

Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Cetacean Research and Conservation Fund (IPF) – a contestable grant program

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific Cetacean Research and Conservation Fund (hereafter referred to as the Indo-Pacific Fund or IPF) selection process will take place from January to April 2010. This Round is open for proposals by Australian and International researchers and organisations. The Fund aims to attract high quality, innovative and relevant research projects that address research and conservation challenges of interest to the Australian Government, developing countries in the Indo-Pacific Region and the cetacean research and conservation community more generally.

Key dates for the round are:

Application stage	Date
Call for expressions of interest	4 January
Expressions of interest due	18 January
Full proposals requested	15 February
Full proposals due	15 March
Notification of results	15 April
Contracts developed and signed	31 May

While every effort will be made to comply with these dates, they are indicative only. Please refer to the IPF web page¹ for the most up to date information.

1. ELIGIBILITY

- Applications must be submitted by a research organisation or institution and not by an individual.
- The IPF supports research by investigators based at the following organisations:
 - universities;
 - university-funded staff in Cooperative Research Centres (CRC);
 - other tertiary education institutions;
 - State museums and State-funded institutions;
 - bodies subject to the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (eg. CSIRO); and
 - international organisations and governments from developing countries.

¹ www.marinemammals.gov.au

2. KEY FEATURES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Following are the key features and considerations of the 2009/10 funding round for the IPF:

- Funding will be provided for projects for up to three years. Successful proposals are eligible to receive between AUD\$10,000 and AUD\$30,000 per year but larger grants may be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- Applications must be submitted by a research organisation or institution not by an individual.
- At a minimum, applicants must:
 - Describe an original research project that is consistent with the aims of the fund, relevant policy documents from the region, and priorities of regional governments.
 - Describe a research project that will contribute new knowledge and add to the broader body of knowledge on cetacean conservation issues in the Indo-Pacific region;
 - Present an interesting and achievable process of knowledge transfer and exchange.
- Research proposals submitted by institutions that have a demonstrated capacity to produce high quality research, particularly institutions in developing countries, and proposals that build viable linkages between developed and developing country research institutions, will be given preference provided the research proposals meet quality requirements.
- The funding round is competitive and no applicant is guaranteed an award.
- The IPF will be administered by the Australian Marine Mammal Centre (AMMC), Australian Antarctic Division, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Assessment of applications will be undertaken by the IPF Steering Committee which comprises representatives from the Australian Government and external representatives from the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

4. OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the IPF is to:

Promote positive conservation outcomes for cetaceans in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions by supporting priority cetacean research and related activities that are consistent with priorities of Australia and for the Indian and South Pacific Ocean regions.

Specifically, the objectives are:

1. to build a stronger scientific base for cetacean policy and conservation in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly within developing countries

2. to deepen the pool of academic expertise about cetaceans within developing countries in the Indo-Pacific region that have traditionally received relatively less research attention
3. to contribute to cetacean research efforts for the global public good
4. to develop partner country capacity to solve local cetacean research, conservation and management issues
5. to foster linkages that encourage solutions to cetacean research and conservation challenges

In addition to the objectives listed above, each year the IPF Steering Committee will identify high priority research and conservation issues. Preference will be given to applications that address these high priority areas.

5. OVERALL PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The funding rounds consist of two stages: (i) an initial Expression of Interest, and (ii) a full application for projects that are selected on the basis of the Expressions of Interest. Applicants are requested to submit an Expression of Interest that is no more than two pages on the approved form². To be eligible, applications must meet all of the required eligibility criteria and applicant components outlined below.

Also note that:

- The funding round is open to all Australian and international not-for-profit institutions or organisations where the organisation has a demonstrated capacity to carry out quality research and manage grant funds appropriately.
- AMMC will fund primary research that has investigation as its main objective and that has observable outcomes.
- This primary objective of the IPF is to fund research but the IPF may provide funding to support projects related to research. For example, for hosting, organising or attending conferences or workshops; producing research publications; consultancy fees for projects that do not meet the definition of research; or for travel to conferences/workshops and/or meetings.
- The funding round will not provide financial support for the conduct of individual researchers' masters or doctoral projects. However if an organisation's proposed research project for this funding round is eligible for support, then any nominated masters or doctoral research that convincingly forms an integral part of the proposed research project may be included.
- Applicants should review policy documents of the relevant country and region when submitting research proposals. The relevant documents for Pacific projects are the *CMS MOU on Cetaceans and their habitats in the Pacific Islands Region*³ and the associated *SPREP Whale and Dolphin*

² www.marinemammals.gov.au

³ www.cms.int/species/pacific_cet/text.htm

*Action Plan 2008-2012*⁴. While there is not an equivalent document for the Indian Ocean, the *Lankanfinolhu Declaration*⁵ which was agreed in 2009, provides some useful direction for cetacean conservation issues in the Indian Ocean region. All projects should align with Australia's international cetacean priorities and address priorities of relevant instruments such as the IWC Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary and the Southern Ocean Research Partnership⁶.

- There is no process of appeal for those applicants whose applications have been deemed ineligible for administrative reasons.
- Project teams, administering agencies and partners funded by AMMC must demonstrate that they are ethically sound and, where applicable, seek animal ethics approval from their nominated administering organisation. Ethics approval requirements in the research project target location (country/countries) must be met. Furthermore, applicants must demonstrate that they have liaised with relevant local communities and governments, and addressed community issues and permits.

6. APPLICANT COMPONENTS

6.1 Application process

Applications follow a two step process. A short (e.g. 2 page) Expression of Interest (Eoi) form⁷ should be sent to AMMC as part of the annually announced IPF grant round. This Eoi will be reviewed by the Steering Committee against relevant strategic documents and the criteria listed below, and ranked accordingly. A more detailed proposal (the full application form will be sent to selected applicants) will be requested from highly ranked Eois and a final set of projects selected for funding.

6.2 Application requirements

The Principal Investigator/s (PI) must nominate an organisation with which he/she is affiliated to administer the grant and provide support. While researchers can apply as individuals or as part of a team, the funds must be administered through an organisation or institution. Applications with a PI, or joint PI, from a developing country will be viewed favourably.

6.3 Objectives

Applicants must indicate how the project addresses the overall aim and specific aims of the IPF. They must also identify how the project relates to the *CMS MOU on Cetaceans and their habitats in the Pacific Islands Region* and the associated *SPREP Whale and Dolphin Action Plan 2008-2012* for Pacific projects and other relevant policy documents for the Indian Ocean. Applications that include a letter of support from the relevant Government where the work will take place, will be viewed favourably.

⁴ www.sprep.org/topic/pdf/marinespeciesweb.pdf

⁵ www.mrc.gov.mv/index.php/news_events/iocs_closing/

⁶ www.marinemammals.gov.au/iwc-initiatives/southern-ocean-research-partnerships-sorp

⁷ www.marinemammals.gov.au

6.4 Eligible costs/funding

The funding round will accept proposals that are up to three years in duration but the length of time must be justified by the nature of the research project.

Applicants can apply for funding between AUD\$10,000 and AUD\$30,000 per year at differentiated levels of funding over the course of the research project. This range is discretionary and a proposal that has a funding level outside of these limits may be submitted for consideration; however, a plausible justification for a deviation from the recommended range must be provided. Grants will be paid in annual instalments subject to ongoing annual monitoring of the project and acceptance of a short Annual Report (expected to be no more than five pages).

AMMC encourages applicants to identify and include co-funding opportunities. Co-funding may include, but not be limited to, in-kind contributions such as release time from teaching duties. In the case that two or more proposals are rated as being of equal merit, preference will be given to the proposal with the greatest level of cost sharing. AMMC will require written evidence of co-funding arrangements.

The research grants cover the following eligible costs:

- The direct costs of research (researcher/s salary, fieldwork costs, travel, insurance)
- Knowledge transfer and exchange
- Capacity development activities (if applicable)

6.5 Capacity Building

The principal purpose of the IPF is to fund high quality research, however given the importance of research capacity to a country's (and a region's) economic growth and development, applications that have a significant element of capacity building will be considered favourably.

6.6 Communication of research

An essential output of IPF research is the communication of the results of the research project across a range of stakeholders from academia, partner countries, the development community and policy-makers. Applicants must suggest an indicative set of interim and final deliverables resulting from the research project. Applicants are encouraged to explore strategies, both proven and innovative, for the communication of information and knowledge with the aim of increasing the impact of the research results. Applicants should be able to demonstrate good familiarity with this important aspect of research.

7. ASSESSMENT OF THE APPLICATION

7.1 Process for assessment of application

The IPF Steering Committee will conduct a high quality process of assessment involving both internal and external review to ensure transparency, accountability and quality. External review will only be undertaken if there is insufficient expertise on the Steering Committee or the

Steering Committee desires additional advice. Applicants will be assessed on a competitive basis according to the selection criteria (listed below); consequently not all applicants will be successful.

Eols must be received by the due date. Eols and full applications will be assessed by AMMC staff for consistency with application requirements. If, on the basis of staff review, an application appears to be ineligible or is considered incomplete, it will be forwarded to the Chair of the IPF Steering Committee to determine if the application should be accepted for review. If deemed ineligible, the Application will not be reviewed and the applicant will receive a brief explanation of the Committee's decision.

Eligible applications will be reviewed by the IPF Steering Committee. This Committee includes representatives from the Australian Government and external representatives from the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Please note that as intellectual property rights are being granted to the applicant, if the proposed research topic is considered politically sensitive (for either the Australian Government and/or Developing Country Government), the application may be deemed ineligible by the Steering Committee.

Following the evaluation of all eligible applications, the Steering Committee will rank all applications, enter into a Funding Agreement, and fund successful projects. These assessments will be based on the assessed relative merit of the proposal against the funding round assessment criteria; funding available; the potential impact of the proposed research project; and the assessed relative importance in terms of relevant current whole-of-government priorities.

Late applications or those that do not comply with the Guidelines will not be assessed.

7.2 Assessment review criteria

In judging proposals assessors will determine the relative merit of proposals against three broad assessment criteria:

1. Quality of proposal;
2. Capacity building merit; and,
3. Funding availability.

The components of these three assessment criteria are listed below. Please refer to these when filling in your application form.

Quality of proposal

25 out of 30 points

- Does the application address all the required components?
- Is the research question(s) and objectives clear?
- Does the project clearly address one or more priorities identified in the relevant policy documents?
- Is there a clear understanding of the state of existing research on the identified research topic?

- Is the proposed methodology and research design suited to the proposed project?
- Is the project cost-effective?
- Is the suggested time frame appropriate?
- Is the project team appropriate and does the team demonstrate adequate capacity to conduct the project?
- Does the institution submitting the application have the capacity to produce quality research and to provide the support required by the project and the team?

Capacity building merit

5 out of 30 points

- Does the project address a gap in knowledge or a conservation or management challenge?
- Will the project facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange between researchers and key stakeholders? Are the suggestions for communication and interaction plausible and achievable?
- Will the project foster links between researchers working in the Indo-Pacific region?
- Will the project potentially assist capacity development in developing country research and/or engage with early career researchers?

Funding availability

- Does the project involve applicant and counterpart cost-sharing contributions?

7.3 Ranking

The assessors will rank applications against the following:

	Criteria	Weighting
Quality of Proposal		
1	Is the intrinsic scientific value of the project of a high standard?	0 Not demonstrated 1 Low scientific value 2 Useful/basic scientific value 3 Good scientific value 4 Very good scientific value 5 Excellent/innovative scientific value
2	How well will the scientific outcomes of the project address the priority areas identified in relevant strategic and policy documents?	0 Not addressed 1 Poorly addressed 2 Reasonably addressed 3 Well addressed 4 Very well addressed 5 Excellently addressed
3	Does the methodology outlined effectively and efficiently address the research questions in the proposal?	0 Not demonstrated 1 Poor methodology 2 Reasonable methodology 3 Good methodology 4 Very good methodology 5 Excellent methodology
4	Is the research proposed feasible, well organised and timeline achievable?	0 Not demonstrated 1 Feasibility, organisation and timeline unrealistic 2 Feasibility, organisation and timeline not properly addressed 3 Feasibility, organisation and timeline sound 4 Feasibility, organisation and timeline demonstrated well 5 Feasibility, organisation and timeline very well demonstrated
5	Do you consider the chief investigator and research team have demonstrated that they are capable of conducting the research and publishing the results?	0 Not demonstrated 1 Poor record 2 Reasonable record 3 Good record 4 Very good record 5 The CI and research team have an excellent research and publication record relevant to the proposed work
Capacity Building		
6	Does the project involve good participation and engagement of regional participants from developing countries?	0 Not demonstrated 1 Poor engagement proposed 2 Reasonable engagement proposed 3 Good engagement proposed 4 Very good engagement proposed 5 Excellent engagement proposed
Overall total out of 30		
7	Is the project to receive co-funding?	

7.4 Waivers

The eligibility criteria pertaining to lodgement of an EoI and application by due dates may be waived in the case of of an unforeseen circumstance (eg. change in Government cetacean priorities) or to address emergencies/exceptional circumstances (eg. to co-fund an activity that suddenly requires additional funds such as a DEWHA or IWC part funded project). Despite these waivers applications will still need to be assessed against assessment criteria by the IPF Steering Committee and to meet all other eligibility criteria.

8. APPLICATION COMPONENT

Applications for expressions of interest should be no longer than 2 pages and must contain the following:

- A clear title relevant to the research proposal.
- An indicative timeline of the project (at a minimum, expected commencement and completion dates).
- An unambiguous and well-articulated research question.
- A short statement outlining how the project will add to the existing body of knowledge.
- A short statement outlining the policy relevance of the project and/or why the project is important to the region.
- A short summary of the proposed project that outlines the research methodology and activities.
- A short statement outlining how the activities and findings of the project could be communicated to a wide group of stakeholders, including those outside of the research community.
- A list of the project team and team members' credentials, including both principal investigators, cross institutional partners, developing country partners and early career researchers, with clear illustration of the capacity to produce quality research.
- Institutional affiliations of the project team
- The anticipated budget of the project broken down annually and in total (in Australian dollars).
- Details of potential cost-sharing.

Full applications should be no longer than ten pages and must contain expanded details of the criteria listed above.

Forms for EoIs are available from the AMMC⁸. Applicants must use the appropriate IPF application form as no other format will be accepted.

9. FEEDBACK ON DISCUSSIONS

The applications will be assessed against set selection criteria to ensure transparency, accountability and quality in decision making.

⁸ www.marinemammals.gov.au

The Steering Committee will provide a general statement on the decisions after their recommendations have been approved by the Minister. This general statement will be posted on the website.

It should be noted that the funding round is competitive. No applicant is guaranteed selection and the decision of the Steering Committee is final.

Appeals will be considered **only** against process issues relating to the application. They will not be considered for any applicant deemed ineligible for administrative reasons, for example, late submission or non-compliance with the Guidelines, or against committee decisions. Appeals must be lodged through the administering organisation's research office and be received within 28 days of the date on the letter notifying the outcomes of applications. The appeal should state the grounds for appeal and be signed by the appellant and the Head of the Organisation or delegate.

The signed appeal should be sent to:

Chair of the IPF Steering Committee
c/- Australian Marine Mammal Centre
Australian Antarctic Division
203 Channel Highway
Kingston 7050 Tasmania

10. QUESTIONS, FEEDBACK AND GENERAL ENQUIRIES

Prior to the closing date, the IPF will accept any questions, feedback, and general enquiries relating to the grant process in writing via email. Please clearly identify the reason for the correspondence in the subject line and address all questions, feedback and general enquiries to ammccordinator@aad.gov.au.

11. FUNDING DETAILS

- A payment will be made upon signing of the funding agreement and the receipt of an invoice.
- For multi-year projects annual payments will be made upon approval of annual progress reports (July of each year).
- Annual financial acquittals of expended, committed and unspent funds are to be included with the progress reports.
- Expenditure of funding exceeding the grant awarded is the responsibility of the organisation and not the AMMC.
- Funding not expended at the completion of the project will be refunded to the AMMC.

12. INFORMATION OWNERSHIP – CONFIDENTIALITY AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- AMMC receives all applications for funding in confidence.

- Intellectual property rights with respect to information contained within applications submitted to AMMC remains with the applicant(s) until varied in accordance with the terms of any contract entered into between the AMMC and the successful Grantee(s).
- All information contained within applications, once received by AMMC and during the process of assessment, will only be disclosed to AMMC staff directly involved with the administration of the funding round, internal and external advisors, panel members, and external referees or disclosed as required by law or to enable AMMC to meet its obligations to Parliament, Ministers and within government.
- Disclosure of any information contained within an application to persons other than those referred to above, or the use of information contained within an application other than in connection with AMMC activities and statutory reporting and archiving requirements, is not permitted.
- Applicants who have not been awarded funding may agree in writing to the disclosure of information contained in their applications to specified persons or for specified purposes.
- AMMC does not claim ownership of any intellectual property created as a result of any project which is funded by research grants. However, AMMC wishes to be able to publish and use all or part of selected research reports. Accordingly, under the terms of the contract, the Grantee will be required to grant to AMMC a permanent, irrevocable, royalty-free licence for this purpose. This arrangement benefits both the Grantee and AMMC. The Grantee may publish their research results independently elsewhere and AMMC has the right to use the results of the research project where and as applicable and appropriate.
- Copies of information products (such as publications, databases, web sites, audio visual material, satellite imagery, computer models and decision support tools) produced with funding from the IPF fund will be collected by the AMMC in a suitable format (as appropriate) to enable archiving and to facilitate delivery via the AAD Data Centre, internet or intranet (as appropriate). Further information will be provided under the funding agreement.