

Scientific Stakeholder Meetings, 3 December 2013 Record of Discussion – Morning Meeting



These notes seek to summarise Scientific Stakeholder discussions in London at a meeting at the Geological Society on the morning of 3 December 2013.

They should be read in conjunction with other documents available on this website from the 'downloads' section including the record of other discussion sessions held that day/week but also, more especially:

- The December 2013 Stakeholder Meetings Powerpoint Presentation
- The INSITE Scope Framework pre-read document provided in advance of the meetings to stakeholder participants

A collated list of all those who attended either this or other related meetings (in person or by telephone) as well as the full list of organisations invited to take part is also reproduced in the 'downloads'.

The notes have been circulated to stakeholders who took part for their verification and comments have been incorporated to improve the accuracy of the record of the event.

Introduction

Opening the meeting, Dr Graham Shimmield introduced himself and invited all those present – from members of the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB) which he chairs and the INSITE Secretariat to external stakeholders – to summarise their own backgrounds and interests.

At the start of all discussions, the Chair explained the objectives of the meeting, namely:

Primary Objective:

- To facilitate a scientific discussion around the proposed INSITE programme to inform ISAB members of areas or issues within the INSITE scope which are considered a priority by the wider stakeholder community.

Other objectives:

- To provide a briefing on the origins of the programme and its proposed execution plan.
- To ensure organisations and individuals who may be key to delivering the programme's objectives are aware of the forthcoming Request for Proposals (RfP).

He then explained the importance of seeking the input of stakeholders at an early stage as well as the desire to raise awareness of the INSITE project.

Discussions would be held on the basis of the Chatham House Rule, with open discussion recorded without attribution of external stakeholder comments.

INSITE Project Director, Richard Heard, then gave an overview of the INSITE initiative with a short PowerPoint presentation (see 'downloads'). This covered the rationale for the project, phasing, funding expectations, governance and independent audit plans, and arrangements for the RfP for which the research objective is:

'To provide stakeholders with the independent scientific evidence base needed to better understand the influence of man-made structures on the ecosystem of the North Sea.'

The RfP will consist of an initial call for pre-proposal summaries (a 'pre-RfP'), following which a shortlist will be produced and invitations made through the main RfP to submit a full proposal. Dr Shimmield explained that INSITE is a scientific programme designed to provide scientific knowledge for use across the wider community. While the research results would have relevance to decommissioning, its uses would not be restricted to this area.

Participant comments (unattributed) and questions made following the opening presentations are shown below, with INSITE responses shown in italics ('...' indicates change of INSITE spokesman):

- The audit procedure is a unique development and an improvement on other joint industry projects (JIPs) such as the Sound and Marine Life JIP, so I strongly welcome the challenge to justify the procedure rather than the content of proposals. Will the report of the audit be published? *Response: Yes, it will be published.*
- What will the legal status of the contracts award? *The contractual agent will be Oil & Gas UK (OGUK) but they will have a very limited role which will be confined to contract executor and financial arrangements. They will not be committing their own funds or be taking any risk. Their expenses will be reimbursed.*
- The timeline is very ambitious, especially for the RfP phase and in establishing consortia – 12 months would be more realistic. *Acknowledged.*
- How was the Independent Science Advisory Board (ISAB) selected, how did it evolve? *A former member of the ISAB present at the meeting (who has since stood down because of a conflict of interests following a change of work) explained that he had originally been asked by OGUK to chair the Board and bring together independent experts to develop a rationale and hypotheses behind a well-structured investigation of the issue via a range of disciplines and with international spread. The Board invitations could have been issued on an open invitation basis but in the early days was still so exploratory that there was no certainty about what would happen. The early days were very much an iterative process, advanced at each meeting, to the point where the ISAB is today. The Chair then confirmed that the ISAB will need to be enlarged to review the pre-Request for Proposals (RfP) and full RfP. Independence, avoiding conflicts of interest, geographical spread and knowledge range will all be key to the collective decision to be taken by the ISAB on additional appointments.*

The Chair then went onto speak about the science of the programme, setting out the discussion framework and key areas of discussion for the morning, also referring to PowerPoint slides. He outlined the background to the development of the thematic areas which are essentially a way of saying that all trophic levels need to be covered, right up to mammals and birds. The first grouping of the ISAB condensed these to a series of hypotheses [as defined in the Pre-Read for the meeting – see 'downloads'] since merely collecting data on thematic areas was not considered to be of potential use. Feedback was invited on this decision, both at the meeting and through other means.

Pending full discussion of the hypotheses after the break, the following points were made in the immediate period that followed the presentation; once again, responses by the INSITE team are shown in italics:

- The foundation phase, in terms of scale and duration, will be limited in scope and phasing of the exploration of the hypotheses. Will the focus be on hypotheses 1 and 2 in the first instance, with other hypotheses picked up later? Will the intention be to verify the hypotheses through the development of the modelling and will later phases be focused on testing? *Broadly speaking, there has to be an evolution from the framework to data simulation and testing, but the ISAB members are keen to see how the early phase can explore the use of new data to take them forward. The preliminary conclusion should be that there is room for other research efforts beyond the modelling. There are models available and if data allows we could probably start to validate them straightaway using pre-existing data. Looking at how existing and proposed data can be used to throw light on the hypotheses will also be important. The ISAB has not yet made any decision about focusing on one or other of the hypotheses at the foundation phases and is staying open about addressing any one of these.*
- There is always a danger that decisions in the foundation phase will drive the rest of the programme so I would advise you to give yourselves enough time to be sure so that there are no regrets later on about having narrowed the field too much at an early stage. It is not necessarily a bad thing to narrow it but judgements must be made carefully to avoid cutting out imaginative possibilities later on.
- Care will be needed about any 'private discussions' later on in terms of audit procedures. Any potential questions from contractors should be lodged through the website so that they are auditable. *We aren't in the*

bidding phase at the moment so this isn't an issue with respect to answering more immediate questions in the light of where we are now, but I agree that once the RfP process begins then rigour in this area will be required.

- Why should the process be limited? The objectives revolve around ecosystems and man-made structures but there is no theme around the structures themselves or what happens as their relationship with the ecosystem evolves over time. *Discussion on this proposed for later in the session.*
- Is INSITE exclusively focused on oil and gas rigs and, if not, are wind turbines involved and why aren't Germany and Belgium represented today? *From the scientific side we are not exclusively focusing on oil and gas structures (hence the use of the term 'man-made'). We also want structures with a range of lifespans and ecosystem impacts. We are very conscious of the complexity as we approach the coast. Yes, we are focusing beyond territorial waters (though these are not explicitly excluded) but not on piers, breakwaters and near-structures because of their different nature and the conditions. Representation was invited from Belgium and Germany for today's meetings.*
- The governance structure is similar to that which exists in the Gulf of Mexico and is well-founded. Regarding the RfP, is there any intention to restrict the type of institutions that can bid? For example, 'for profit' companies and government institutions? *The frank answer is that the ISAB needs to do more work to address this, alongside conflicts of interest which could cover bidding organisations. We have had dialogue with those involved with the Gulf of Mexico to understand the conflicts issue. It is still early days but we want to make the RfP as open as possible but we will have to draw the line somewhere. Today we would welcome thoughts on this. As institutions put budgets forward, we will need to consider them in conjunction with their own objectives.*
- How would you address the idea of consortia of not-for-profit and profit-focused bidders? *It will depend on the nature of existing data: some data may not be in the public domain and, because we want an open process, this approach would have to be reconciled with the programme objectives and capabilities. That is part of the role of the ISAB and why we need to set out the process so it can be seen very clearly whether we have followed it.*
- Discount and profit need careful thought. *We have thought about the need for this to be covered and addressed ahead of the pre-RfP and RfP issue.*
- Could you elaborate on your views on stakeholder involvement and what to do if you don't have the information you need? *This will depend on what information is missing – a simple response might be to hold evidence sessions or set up sub-groups, recording the proceedings for publication e.g. through the website. But this is primarily a scientific programme, not stakeholder led – even though it is important to maintain dialogue. The stakeholder element of the programme is really to identify where stakeholders have concerns and how these gaps can be addressed and to ensure effective dialogue and communication.*
- Because of the huge amount of expectation can you specify how you will monitor and report on projects in terms of the ongoing process to provide checks and balances. *The Project Director role will cover this. It is important to ensure funders are comfortable but also the wider stakeholder community post-award.*
- Congratulations are due to the Chair and Project Director, as well as OGUK, for getting the programme to this point. It is an iterative process and we will all learn from today. But one issue I have is on the breadth of scope which is broader than oil and gas structures and is an opportunity for involving other industries so that they can come in and add strength to the funding base to help deliver some of the knowledge that is needed – even though there's a risk of going too wide. *Yes, it would be a measure of success if we could broaden the support base. There may also be possibilities for the project to benefit from other existing programmes which by slight modification could also feed in data, even if this latter is not part of the INSITE-funded programme – for example, in cases where there are mutual benefits in early knowledge-sharing.*

Following a short break, participants reconvened for a discussion of the hypotheses and other points arising, summarised below with INSITE responses in italics:

- Is it really practical to address the research on the basis of 'excluding the impact of fisheries'? *We are trying not to focus on a major interaction with human and fisheries, but rather the influence of structures on fisheries,*

and the associated fishing practices (for example, exclusion zones). I understand the logic of this, but given climate change and fisheries impacts are so great I am not sure how we can achieve the research goals if we exclude them. I would welcome other comments on this. Fisheries are changed by human intervention so the question is how we disentangle this but maintain sight of the influence on fisheries.

- There are presentational ways to avoid this but to study without acknowledging one of the main abstractions is inappropriate.
- Fishing, transport and other things all put pressure on the system but zooming in, man-made infrastructure is surely the focus here, acknowledging that you could study more in framing the hypotheses but identifying particular areas to be studied. *Of course these need be taken into account. Maybe if first of all the ecosystem of hard substrate in the North Sea were examined and then the pressures investigated, exploring fishing, acidification and others, before moving onto build a wider North Sea picture to look at how ecosystems influence the North Sea as a whole.*
- The whole fundamental question of the programme is the impact of man-made structures and if you can say that this is the focus, and not just the fish, this clarity will overcome the problem. *Or perhaps modify the statement to say that 'the impact of fisheries will not be directly considered'?*
- I agree with the idea of exploring fishing, acidification etc. – a study of hotspots would be useful and their role in recovery. A recent wind farm study in the Netherlands showed that fish simply swim through the area. I would suggest you limit your focus to your core proposition, i.e. the influence of man-made structures, and then take into consideration the enormous reduction of fishing pressure, back to the level of the early 1960s, with stocks growing back, with no need to look further regarding that impact. A coherent network of Marine Protected Areas is in our minds. Are you suggesting man-made structures are a part of or a discrete network of structures of itself?
- I understand why the hypotheses are set out as they are, but maybe you have created problems for yourself as the use of hypotheses suggests you are seeking to prove something. You could preface each hypothesis with 'to what extent does...?' in order to avoid presupposing anything or steering bidders. Simple editing could assist with this. *There was a sense of imposing strict scientific language, confirming the scientific basis of the project, rather than a general or loose approach susceptible to all sorts of other types of inputs.*
- Hypothesis 3, about the spatial and temporal variability in the North Sea ecosystem, presupposes that a certain answer is being sought. *If the hypotheses trigger widespread concern about the influence of man-made structures then we have to rephrase them. We have to focus on the pinpricks that are the man-made structures and, if necessary, rewrite.*
- If you went out to the NGO community you would face a challenge over the phrasing as it currently stands as it would give the wrong impression. It will be important to make clear in your communications that the intention is NOT to rationalise the result. *Yes, it will be important to clarify these things.*
- There is a need to clarify the man-made structures terminology to include 'submerged' or similar. Environmental NGOs could be worried about dumping. 'Blue infrastructure' terminology needs to be separated out. I am still trying to understand why the hypotheses are built in a successive way so that one is dependent on the other. *I indicated a sequential approach earlier and probably overemphasised this. We are definitely trying to build a way forward through a systematic approach so to the extent that if we were to address hypotheses 3 and 4 as a topic or hypotheses then it would probably be useful to have had some knowledge and consideration of hypothesis 1 first. There is a logic flow between hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 4 but if they are recast as objectives rather than sequential hypotheses this may be more helpful. Hypothesis 4 is the key hypothesis.*

The Chair asked whether anyone present had further points to make on the framing of the hypotheses, which drew the following responses:

- It would be useful to insert the reference to 'age' in the wording as concrete and steel deteriorate at different rates. Hypothesis 1 relates to totally biological matters but some effects are non-biological. There are

interactions with waves and currents and to not make reference to the non-biological effects is an omission in my view. *The ISAB discussions have included the unique coupling of chemical, physical and biological characteristics.* This should be clarified, then, by the addition of an appropriate sentence.

- 'Each structure' could be rephrased to 'Each component of a structure' and eventually could lead to a decommissioning conversation. Engineering design might include use of the structure or potential use of a structure, in line with decommissioning themes. *This approach would lead to a hierarchy of complexity within the study whereas the hypotheses are intended as a form of reductionism to encompass the range of possibilities. It is almost impossible to use them in a predictive sense. Part of the challenge is to think of this in a way that enables relative contributions to ecosystems by man-made structures.*
- Non-biological impacts will result from materials ageing over time. Also, addressing the hypotheses issue, the point is that we need to frame them in a way that works in the future, identifying who is going to be comfortable with what at the end of the study. *So there is a sense of managing expectations – to what extent do outputs foreseen relate to expectations? We have to frame the expectations, set up a peer reviewed, unbiased process for a coherent programme, and ensure delivery is as per the original design with respect to access, dissemination and process). The use of the scientific output is almost beyond ISAB at present but we do need to know possibilities now to make framing helpful to the eventual outcome.*
- In terms of policy, the regulator and decision making, we have to incorporate the possibilities now to make the research meaningful and ensure a good process. There are some very strategic issues to address.
- A communications plan is needed before the process starts.
- Potential conflicts from looking at this in several ways aren't necessarily an issue – look at the IPPC model which avoids such a conflict. However, the approach must be embedded from the start.
- Dissemination of work as an ongoing process is important, so how stakeholders are engaged throughout the programme will be important. *What are ISAB members' views on how much shaping is done at the outset to shape policy later? ...It would be one step to far for me. What we do and will do is to ensure that for stakeholders and others that the scientific programme is embedded in the larger context of what happens to larger structures at the end of their life. It must be set out clearly. The programme in itself is meant to be purely scientific throughout. ...It is very important that the model has no predetermined outcomes and that it is not about leaving structures in place. The starting point as an industry JIP is that there is no advocacy for leaving anything behind.*
- Regarding translation of knowledge, the results have to be useful to industry and policy makers. This has to be built into the delivery process now so that it works in three years' time. *In other words, a knowledge strategy, transiting through scientific programmes to outcomes.*
- Managing expectations is important. Funders will have their own expectations. You have said that this is a scientific study but there are 12 operators funding this and there will be expectations for this and subsequent phases. We have to have those expectations on what will be delivered up front to avoid potential issues of funding for the next stage. *Agreed – and dialogue with the sponsors over two years has shown the truth of what you say. We have had lots of meetings describing benefits and delivery mechanisms and they understand that they are taking a leap of faith. There is a range of expectations, including benevolence in terms of publishing outcomes, and the funders are just about to sign contracts.*
- At the Offshore Decom conference in October, it was really refreshing to hear that the industry wants to think about the scientific side. Their expectations need to be managed very closely, though.
- Sponsors are not always philanthropic and previous discussions were hampered by a lack of knowledge, so why do this research now? *The goal is to raise knowledge levels together. We don't think it is a lot of money. Part of the convincing we have had to undertake has been 'why now', 'why bother'. Yes it is a good thing to do. Yes there is a defined context with OSPAR 98/3 regarding decommissioning. But there is also a distinct lack of knowledge with which to engage in debate and this is why the research needs to go ahead.*
- Fishermen are naturally a suspicious group. They will fear that this knowledge will be used against them and will be afraid of the outcome of these things. How do I get the message across to my community that they can trust this initiative? *One of the key objectives for today is that participants feel they have sufficient knowledge*

about the project and by raising awareness see how the project is being constructed, intended method of conduct and how outcomes are likely to emerge – and to draw on the dialogue with stakeholders to make the programme successful. We should emphasise and re-emphasise that this will be a completely open process. While we will try to communicate the results, what people do with them is their responsibility.

- I can't give a view on the science but I do know about fishing. Are we looking at the positive or the negative influences? Have man-made structures attracted fish? Yes. Have they made for more dangerous fishing? Yes. My question is will the negative impacts of man-made structures be considered? *We need to be explicit within the further explanation of 'impact' and this may change over the course of time. We definitely don't rule out consideration of negative impacts.*
- One model might be to commission then publish; or, as an alternative, bring together stakeholders and users as the project evolves and propose a user group as a model. *This has not been explicitly considered but could be – there would be a fit with the need for effective engagement so it could be a good call. We are focusing on stakeholder engagement here. An earlier question was 'how do I go back to those I represent' and so I want to speak more about science and also about data this morning.*
- You said that the hypotheses are linked. In terms of process, what thoughts have you had regarding sequencing in the order in which you do things and logically associate with that sequencing of process different from prioritisation? *We mustn't undermine later outcomes by earlier assumptions.*
- I can put it positively: create and maintain links. Perhaps have a news feed on the Internet site. I would like a positive commitment to communicating with stakeholders. Two-way flow is vital. *It is our intent to use a number of tools to execute our communications strategy. Stakeholder dialogue will help inform this, but the right vehicles must be chosen to meet the needs and interests of those with whom we are engaging, ensuring they are meaningful and timely, rather than undertaken for the sake of it.*
- Transparency and openness, especially through the web will be helpful. Selection of the Board and the Terms of Reference need to be set out clearly to maintain the credibility of the project. There will be different opportunities for taking engagement further, such as through conferences such as SEPSTA where fringe meetings on INSITE might be held, with invitations issued explicitly to NGOs, government representatives and others.
- Make sure that you don't conflate awareness-raising amongst wider stakeholder audiences with project engagement with key stakeholders – they are two different things. Key stakeholders need to have a higher level of awareness of the details of the project and the sharing of data. Access to data is often about trust. This means using the right language at the right time.

The Chair then asked those representing the research community what they thought the response to the RfP was likely to be.

- There is a great deal of interest. The science questions are very topical. The subject touches upon the whole Marine Protected Areas issue and so there will be interest from not only the conservation community but ecology-focused organisations too. It's a nice model system with interesting questions to be asked. You are likely to be inundated. Probably many times oversubscribed for the funds available. It may be worth matching people to each other – such an approach can work, but is very dependent on the way the call for proposals is phrased. Language is key. Be clear on the size of projects as this will help. The number of projects and likely size in terms of resources should be clearly set out to avoid bidders being over-ambitious. *So issues include being inundated, short timescale, sift process, transparency...?*
- Conversations with contacts in Norway suggest a big response is likely, with a good deal of interest from universities and research institutions who are interested in hard bottom ecosystem studies, fishing, migration of organisms.
- I think that the funding available is actually quite small. Would it be possible for bidders to identify other bodies who might bring further funding? Would this leverage be allowed? *There are possibilities on that front. What we will see is some good research and a philosophy adopted to allow it to blossom in further phases. The*

initial requirement is for a sound foundation phases but it could grow into a broader initiative going beyond oil and gas.

- It is important to leave the possibilities open. In phases 2 and 3 you may want to improve leverage to double or treble the funding.
- Transactional costs will be high.
- The amount of money available is rather small and you will only be able to fund a small handful of projects, hence an open call could waste time for people. Maybe be clearer in the initial call to avoid wasting people's time. *The initial call for proposals – the pre-RFP – will require a simple two page response. The ISAB will then sift the applications before drawing up a shortlist. Only at full proposal stage will we go to peer review. There will be a systematic review of the situation to identify some of the key possibilities. We want to encourage investment in the future so it would be useful to identify gaps to help with the focus. We might encourage other additional sponsors to join, too.*
- Regarding the availability of data, is there any consensus on this, including studies and data already undertaken? Where are the gaps? *There has been a very topline assessment of this, but it's quite superficial and not in the public domain. But you are posing questions that we are also posing within the ISAB. Our view is that only data that can be validated is worthwhile, and we know there is good and not so good data, so this is something which needs to be addressed. This is a very important issue for the project. ...We also need to clarify what real data is available. The project will develop a data management protocol to enable consultation with oil companies within an acceptable framework. It will also examine what mechanisms are available within those companies for identifying and releasing the data, and whether it has the necessary quality. Should we be looking at this before we take the project further? It could be the first project.*

The Chair then invited all external stakeholders to make final comments before the close of the meeting, recorded as follows:

- The first step should be to commission a systematic review of the work that has already been undertaken in relation to the "hypotheses" and to identify data gaps. Whilst the review is underway, take the opportunity to secure additional funds as the existing budget is currently insufficient to cover the likely extent of work required. In addition, use the opportunity to put in place the necessary commissioning processes for the robust and transparent assessment process in anticipation of a large number of proposals.
- For themes like fishing, do you translate reference to 'indicators' or leave them to the project proposers? How do you define 'significant'? *We are leaving this open for the moment. When we have the criteria sorted we will include a ranking as part of the RfP.*
- Stakeholder engagement linked to the North Sea is important. You should tie into the Marine Strategy Framework Directive descriptors as there may already be useful links here. Include ICES in your stakeholders. Don't reinvent the wheel.
- It has been an interesting three hours. I would reiterate the need for balance and dissemination and link with the scientific community to ask whether the right questions are being asked. Also, I'd say that three years (and the end of the foundation phase) is not that far away.
- When I heard about the project a month ago I thought it sounded really worthwhile and I hope you go forward with it.
- I agree – there is a huge amount of excitement about this, even though the funding is relatively small for the large number of topics that could be covered, so I am in favour of the idea of focus to make the best use of the money. Really tangible, clear outputs and good stakeholder engagement will be important.
- Norwegian support would be helpful [from oil and gas companies]. There is expertise in the Continental Shelf and research over the last three decades undertaken in Norway has proved useful in terms of living with fisheries, shipping and the environment, also in relation to society. One of the fishing leaders said earlier that sometimes it is hard to keep everyone happy, but we have to try.

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- Congratulations on a courageous timeline. Our network of scientists and NGOs, as well as international parliamentary representatives, would be more than glad to participate in discussion to lead to answers.
 - Mini-sessions could be set up through our organisations to foster discussion through a wider network, drawing on our convening power.
 - It is important to be wide ranging in the research – even though this will be challenging – so we have to look closely at the wording in the RfP.
 - I appreciate the opportunity to have been part of the group today and it is especially important to see what the science proves through the studies.
 - I would reiterate appreciation of the invitation to be here today and the early consultation, rather than only being invited in at a later stage when everything is decided. I look forward to being kept abreast of developments and in return would be pleased to help provide input from those we represent.
 - As an NGO I share some of the concerns expressed earlier about the oil and gas industry, also on the availability of data where commercial interests and study outcomes could give rise to conflicts, but it is fabulous to be going down this route of further research. The assurances on transparency and process are good.
 - Congratulations on getting this far. It is very worthy and very welcome. I agree with much that has been said but it is a very good new initiative which I think will stimulate a lot of interest.
 - It certainly wasn't a waste of time. Thank you for the invitation. Having an independent body to review the process and conduct of the initiative is a good idea. The Bill Sutherland geo-engineering/Delphi meeting precedent could be worth considering.

In addition, one of the ISAB members added to the Chair's own comments in noting how helpful and useful the session had been.

The Chair thanked those present and reiterated that follow up and regular reports on progress would be made.