

UK Marine Biomolecular Group Terms of Reference

November 2024

Purpose and Objectives

There are a number of DNA groups already active, however, there is no UK group which currently focuses on marine DNA workstreams. Marine ecosystems do pose additional questions not currently being addressed in other fora, and this group will provide a valuable space to discuss current work and challenges faced to advance these areas. This group will not look to duplicate existing work and recognises that there is a lot that can be learnt and is transferrable from other fields. Its focus will be on collaboration and knowledge sharing, both amongst its members but also through feeding into external groups as appropriate.

Purpose

The purpose of the group is to share updates on work related to the development and application of biomolecular techniques for marine monitoring, to identify and prioritise gaps in our knowledge base and seek to work collaboratively to fill these with the potential for collaborative funding bids to develop resource.

Scope

This group will have a focus on operationalising biomolecular methods in the UK. This doesn't prohibit people working from or on projects outside the UK from joining.

Within the scope of this group biomolecular is defined as including environmental DNA and RNA (eDNA/eRNA) and 'omics (DNA, RNA and protein).

This group will work independently and feed into external groups such as the Healthy and Biologically Diverse Seas Evidence Group (HBDSEG) and the UK DNA working group. See 'Groups of interest' spreadsheet for a full list.

Objectives and Actions

The group will work together to achieve the following objectives:

1. To support coordination of the development and application of marine biomolecular work across the UK, mapping what is being done and the roles, interests and goals of various institutions
 - a. Identify and prioritise knowledge and data gaps and seek opportunities to fill these
 - b. Review the UK DNA Benthic Action Plan and prioritise actions to address
2. To develop best practice and/or peer reviewing system of DNA methodologies and produce mechanisms of validating methods more quickly
 - a. Work with the NE Atlantic Marine Biological Analytical Quality Control (NMBAQC) to develop guidelines

- b. Review of existing and emerging technologies for sample acquisition
- 3. To advocate for and promote biomolecular approaches for marine monitoring, conservation and management.
 - a. Work collaboratively to seek opportunities to promote marine DNA approaches within organisations and more widely
 - b. Raise the profile of the potential role for the application of molecular approaches for the purpose of marine conservation and management

Governance and Structure

Governance

JNCC will provide the Chair and Secretariat function for the group. If other organisations wish to contribute support, they are invited to contact the chair.

Task and Finish (T&F) groups, consisting of a subset of the wider membership, may be established to address any emerging and specific objectives or actions. T&F groups will report back to the main group at meetings.

JNCC will hold membership contact details in compliance with [JNCC's privacy policy](#). Contact details will only be used for the purpose of communicating within this group and must not be shared externally.

Membership

Membership of the group is open to UK Government organisations, research institutes and universities. Membership is not currently open to private/commercial companies; however, they may be invited to present on topics of interest or join task and finish groups as appropriate.

Members are asked to actively participate in the group through sharing their experience and knowledge at meetings, or if appropriate inter-sessionally via email or other communication channels.

Membership will be reviewed as needed.

Meetings and Communications

Meetings will be held 3 times a year. Where possible, they will take place shortly before HBDSEG meetings to allow members to update HBDSEG on group activity. Meetings will mainly take place online via Teams, with one in-person meeting per year if resourcing allows.

Members are invited to contact the Secretariat or Chair with items for the agenda.

Agendas will be circulated at least one week prior to meetings occurring. Meetings will be minuted and these will be circulated within two weeks of the meeting taking place to act as a reference of discussions and document actions

If deemed useful in the future, a MS Teams site or SharePoint will be set up to allow for collaborative working and to share documents.

External

The group will look to engage with other relevant groups to stay informed, promote and disseminate the work of the group, avoid duplication and encourage collaboration. To streamline this, and minimise extra workload, nominated liaison contacts will be identified.