



AFRICAN COELACANTH ECOSYSTEM PROGRAMME (ACEP)
INFRASTRUCTURE LINKED FUNDING INSTRUMENT

THEMATIC RESEARCH SUPPORT AND ADVANCEMENT

Framework Document

AUGUST 2026

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1. CALL FOR PROPOSALS

1.1 FUNDING INSTRUMENT TITLE

The African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP) Marine Infrastructure-Linked Funding Instrument (2027-2029).

1.2 FUNDING INSTRUMENT DESCRIPTION

The ACEP consists of four major driving forces:

1. ACEP Open Research Call (this call)
2. ACEP Marine Platform Provision
3. ACEP Phuhlisa Transformation Programme
4. ACEP Joint Marine Laboratories

The ACEP Marine Infrastructure-Linked Funding Instrument promotes marine research along the east and southern coast of South Africa by providing competitive access to research funding in conjunction with approved access to the following infrastructure:

- ACEP and Shallow Marine and Coastal Research Infrastructure (SMCRI) funded the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB) and South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON) platforms:
 - Coastal Craft fleet and associated equipment,
 - Marine Remote Imagery Platform (MaRIP),
 - Acoustic Tracking Array Platform (ATAP), and
 - Geophysics Mapping Platform (GeMaP)
 - Algoa Bay and KZN Sentinel Sites
 - Airborne Remote Sensing.

The ACEP Open Research Call for 2027-2029 seeks to attract marine research applications that will maximise the use of available equipment not normally available at HEIs, or NRF-recognised research institutions. The ACEP Funding Instrument is specifically designed around infrastructure access. As such, research applications that do not require infrastructure support are advised to apply to other NRF funding instruments.

1.3 CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The ACEP invites applications to an Open Call for a three-year funding cycle (2027-2029). All application materials must be submitted electronically via the NRF's Submission system at <https://nrfconnect.ac.za>. All applications must be endorsed by the research office of the principal investigator before submission to the NRF.

It is the responsibility of each applicant to familiarise himself / herself with the internal closing dates set by their institution to meet the NRF closing date. **Incomplete or late submissions will not be considered.**

Call Opens: **24 August 2026**

UFS Internal Closing Date: **21 September 2026**

ACEP support will be awarded for a period not exceeding three years (**2027–2029**). The last year to enrol students will be the beginning of 2029. Student commitments will be honoured beyond 2026 if all NRF grant conditions are fulfilled. Fieldwork should be planned for 2027 and 2028, leaving 2029 to finish any incomplete field components.

Academic year	Financial year	Nature	Research Platform support
2026	2026/27	Application Review	RIISA
2026	2026/27	Announcements (15 Dec 2026)	RIISA
2027	2027/28	Funded	Provided
2028	2028/29	Funded	Provided
2029	2029/30	Funded (last year to enrol)	Limited – finish incomplete fieldwork
2030	2030/31	Roll-over year (if approved)	Not provided
2031	2031/32	Last roll-over year	Not provided
2032	2032/33	Programme ended – no funds	No support

1.4 Contact details

For technical queries (NRF Connect)

SUPPORT DESK

012 481 4202

Supportdesk@nrf.ac.za

For all NRF RIISA application content -related queries:

Ms Singathwa Mbangeni

012 481 4269

S.Mbangeni@risa.nrf.ac.za

Ms Tracy Klarenbeek

012 481 4177

TJ.Klarenbeek@risa.nrf.ac.za

For all infrastructure-related queries:

Dr Anthony Bernard

046 603 5842

atf.bernard@saiab.nrf.ac.za

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Research Foundation (NRF) recognises that for South Africa to be internationally competitive and to meaningfully contribute to the global economy, the country must have the capability

to understand the knowledge produced by others. This understanding can best be developed through performing research. Publicly funded basic and applied research is viewed as a source of new ideas, opportunities, methods, and most importantly, the means through which problem solvers can be trained.

The ACEP is a long-term funding instrument designed to ensure the creation of a demographically balanced geographically specific research programme that strives for internationally competitive research, promotes inter-disciplinarity and creates links with other African countries.

The 2016 DSTI Marine and Antarctic Research Strategy serves to link South Africa's comparative geographic and research advantage, regional stewardship, and national interest considerations to research themes to stimulate systems scale integration of knowledge and understanding.

The ACEP was initiated after the discovery of coelacanths off Sodwana Bay, South Africa, in 2000, and was one of the first multidisciplinary, multi-national research programmes to facilitate extensive ecosystem-based research in the Southwest Indian Ocean. The ACEP Open Call thus focuses on the east and southern coast of South Africa.

The ACEP is a flagship programme of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) and the National Research Foundation (NRF). Key partners in terms of platform provision include SAIAB and SAEON in their capacity as National Facilities of the NRF. The infrastructure aligned with the ACEP open call is managed by SAIAB.

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The mandate of the NRF is to support and promote research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the necessary research facilities in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, and innovation and development in all fields of science and technology, including indigenous knowledge, supporting and promoting public awareness of, and engagement with, science and thereby contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of all the people of the Republic (NRF Act, 1998, as amended 2019). This mandate directly supports the South African government's national priorities.

The NRF's wider research support strategy is guided by the Science Technology and Innovation Decadal Plan 2022-2032¹ (STI Decadal Plan). The Decadal Plan highlights critical areas for investment through 2032, including strengthening human resources for Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), to transform the research system, and create an enabling environment for innovation and impact. This plan aligns with the final phase of the National Development Plan (NDP). The NRF Vision 2030 translates the vision of the 2019 White Paper on STI into defined priorities and thematic areas. This targeted approach ensures that NRF investments address national challenges while they align with global

¹ DSTI Science Technology and Innovation Decadal Plan 2022 – 2032. Science, technology and innovation enabling inclusive and sustainable South African development in a changing world <https://www.dsti.gov.za/index.php/documents/strategies-and-reports/189-sti-decadal-plan>

mandates such as the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals² (SDG's) as detailed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The NRF's strategic vision is one in which knowledge and research are at the epicentre of national development. This is reflected in the NRF vision 2030³. NRF strategy 2030 provides the roadmap for the achievement of the aspirational goals set out in NRF vision 2030, which envisions a globally competitive, inclusive, and impactful research enterprise. It seeks to position the NRF as a catalyst for knowledge generation and application to ensure that research contributes directly to national development priorities and global competitiveness. Funding instruments are designed to support a world-class knowledge and research enterprise of which the products and effects bring about advancement of the frontiers of knowledge; improve the quality of life of the people in the country; improve the competitiveness of strategic sectors and industries of our economy; provide for better protection and preservation of our national natural heritage; and lead the elevation of the technological base of our country. Ultimately, these activities collectively contribute to building a better society through research.

4. STRATEGIC INTENT

The ACEP is a specific intervention that ensures that this equipment is optimally used and that researchers throughout the NSI have access. Successful research teams are provided with research platform access and running expenses.

The intent of the NRF's support of the ACEP is to:

- Advance knowledge and innovation in key research priority areas that are important to South Africa;
- Contribute to the development of high-level skills in critical knowledge domains, particularly in areas that will benefit the society; and
- Enhance the impact of knowledge outputs generated through research in priority sectors through strategic partnerships with key stakeholders across South Africa's National System of Innovation (NSI).

5. OBJECTIVES

The overarching objectives of the ACEP funding instrument are:

- To provide funding support for research and associated human capacity development in the African Coelacanth Ecosystem

² United Nations: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Transforming our World <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

³ National Research Foundation Vision 2030. Research for a better society <https://www.saasta.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NRF-Vision-2030.pdf>

- To contribute to multidisciplinary, inter-, or transdisciplinary knowledge production in the African Coelacanth Ecosystem (the east or southern coast of South Africa);
- As a key driver in the generation of marine spatial data and multidisciplinary data, proposals must cover as many of the following data layers as possible: oceanography, pelagic biodiversity, and benthic environment. Single-discipline research cruises will not be supported;
- To achieve world-class, socially relevant research in the Natural Science, Social Science and/or the Humanities and to develop associated human capacity;
- To advance or develop paradigms, theories and methodological innovation relating to the geographic area;
- To facilitate institutional, national and international collaborations; and
- To align the ACEP research investment directly with the NRF Strategy 2030 and STI Decadal Plan.
- To ensure that key marine research infrastructure is made available to research scientists throughout the National System of Innovation (NSI). The DSTI and other ACEP partners have invested heavily in marine equipment and systems that are not readily available elsewhere in the NSI.

5.1 ACEP Infrastructure Objectives

ACEP aims to ensure that key marine research infrastructure is made available to research scientists throughout the NSI. ACEP is a specific intervention that ensures that this equipment is optimally used and that researchers throughout the NSI have access. Successful research teams are provided with research platform access and running expenses. By design, ACEP does not support research proposals that do not intrinsically require research platform access.

5.2 Platform Research Objectives

Key research areas include:

Innovation

- Development of capacity of marine bio-discovery and biotechnology.
- Development of capacity and application of machine learning in marine sciences.
- Development, and application, of low-cost research equipment to address other key research areas highlighted in this list.
- Development of capacity in underwater soundscape ecology and underwater acoustics research.

Biodiversity and Ecology, and Oceanography

- Foundational species information for priority taxonomic groups – highly utilised species, endemic marine invertebrates.
- Research to elucidate the key drivers of offshore biodiversity patterns.
- Mapping & assessment of ecological infrastructure and benefits of biodiversity to people.
- Research to support understanding of canyon ecology.

- Research including foundational ecosystem research to test, validate and improve the marine ecosystem classifications of the National Biodiversity Assessment.
- Research to support finer-scale habitat mapping of fluvial inputs, muds, hard grounds (including cold water corals, deep reefs, submarine canyons and other sensitive habitat types).
- Research to support understanding of paleo-ecosystems.
- Research to support the understanding of resources species' value to the ecosystem and the impacts of harvesting.
- Foundational knowledge of ocean soundscape ecology.
- Research to provide a better understanding of the Agulhas Current and inshore coastal interactions which may impact the local ecosystems.

Marine Spatial Planning, MPA Research and Resource Management

- Research to support MPA design including connectivity, transport pathways, dispersal distances and migration pathways and links to estuaries.
- Foundational species assessments in MPAs.
- Identify areas critical to life phases not currently protected by MPAs.
- Research to support the refinement of biodiversity targets within MPAs including habitat and species representation and persistence targets.
- Research to refine methods and indicator species and effectively support the monitoring and effectiveness of management interventions, including measuring and monitoring spill-over effects.
- Research to support line-fish stock assessment and recovery, including the value of MPAs in this process.
- Identify future refugia that may need protection due to movement of species.

Global and Climate Change

- Ecological water requirement studies and the impacts of freshwater flow reduction into the marine environment – fluvial dependent coastal ecosystems.
- Research to support the understanding of industry and other emerging pressure's impacts (e.g. aquaculture, mining, oil spills, marine noise) on habitats and species e.g., condition assessments, habitat recovery and resilience.
- Impact of plastic and micro-plastic on ecosystems and species.
- Invasive species research.
- Research/capacity development to support restoration of coastal habitats/species.

6. RESEARCH PLATFORM DESCRIPTION AND LOGISTICS

6.1 GENERAL

The ACEP call is for multidisciplinary, infrastructure-linked projects and as such only projects that are not possible without platform support will be considered.

The following platforms are available, and the applicants must ensure they **specifically indicate** which platforms they wish to apply for in their application. The costs associated with these platforms are borne by the ACEP Management Team and **DO NOT** form part of the PI's grant award.

It is essential that applicants discuss their projects with the relevant platform technicians or instrument scientists in terms of feasibility. Below are the contacts who should be engaged with during the proposal phase to ensure that platform planning within the project is feasible.

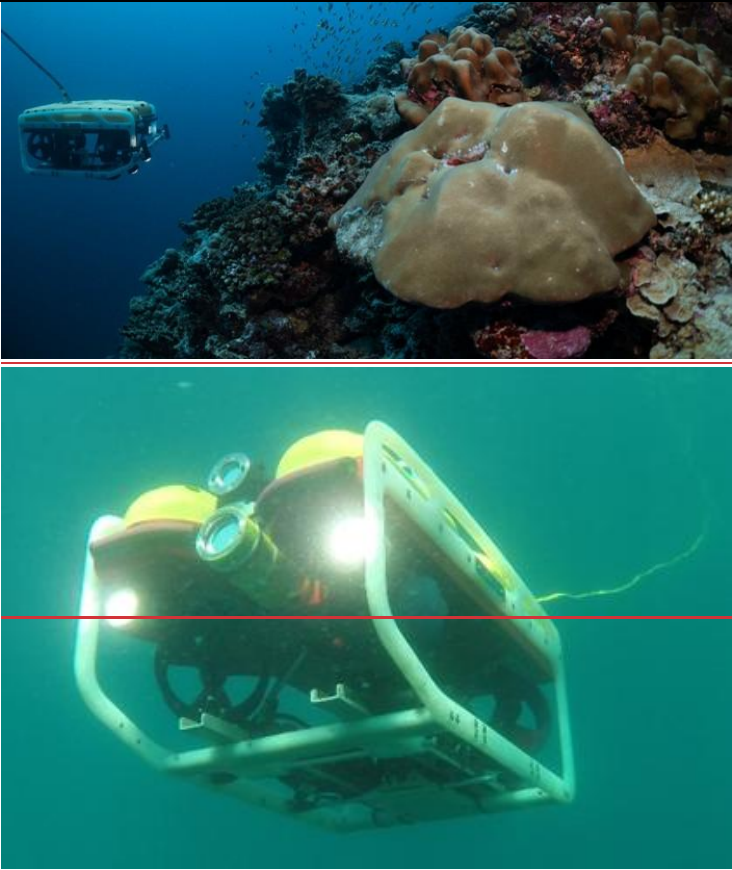
Platform	Platform manager	Contact
Coastal Craft	Anthony Bernard	atf.bernard@saiab.nrf.ac.za
Acoustic Tracking Array Platform	Taryn Murray	ts.murray@saiab.nrf.ac.za
Marine Remote Imagery Platform	Anthony Bernard	atf.bernard@saiab.nrf.ac.za
Geophysics Mapping Platform	Thami Wanda	t.wanda@saiab.nrf.ac.za
SAEON Sentinel Site	Tommy Bornman Shaun Deyzel	tg.bornman@saeon.nrf.ac.za hp.deyzel@saeon.nrf.ac.za
Airborne Remote Sensing	Tommy Bornman Sean Bailey	tg.bornman@saeon.nrf.ac.za se.bailey@saeon.nrf.ac.za
Equipment use on 3 rd party vessel	Anthony Bernard	atf.bernard@saiab.nrf.ac.za

6.2 INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLATFORMS

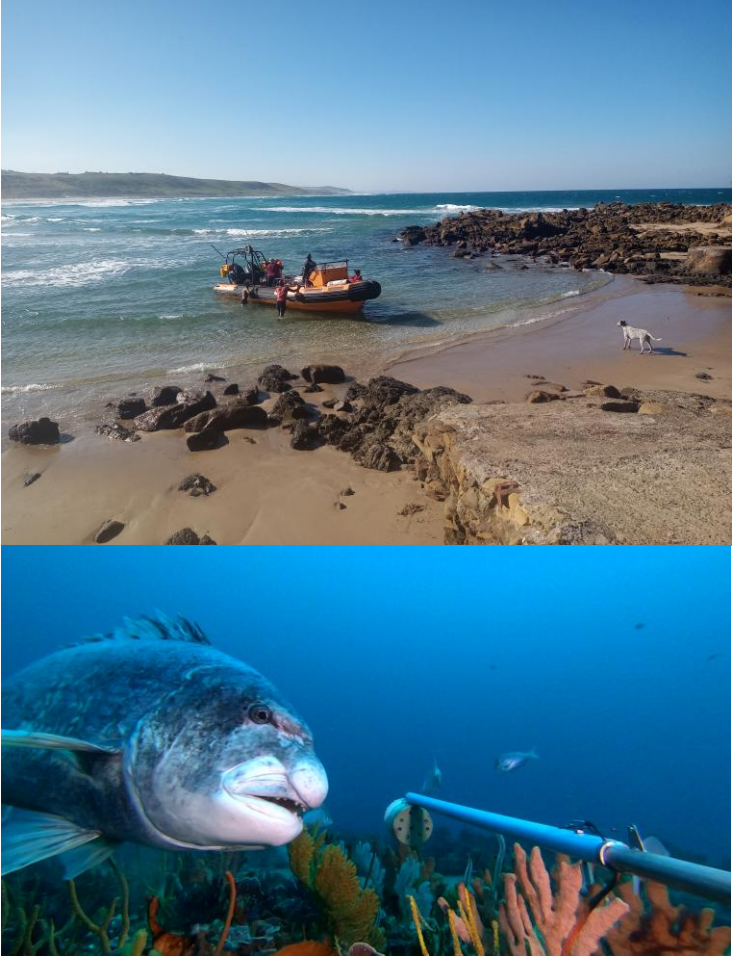
PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Coastal Craft Platform provided by: SAIAB / ACEP / SMCRI	<i>RV Observer</i> Home Port: Port Elizabeth Area of operation – East London, Gqeberha, Mossel Bay Available 2027-2029: One 21-day period per year (max 2 trips per project) operating from East London, Gqeberha or Mossel Bay 	<i>RV Observer</i> is a 15 m catamaran vessel, ideal for work up to 2-day trips (48 hours) in duration. She is suitable for bay-scale projects. Please note that RV Observer is NOT a ship; she has coastal craft capabilities. <i>RV Observer</i> will be based in Port Elizabeth but will be available to be stationed in East London or Mossel Bay for one 3-week periods per year per project (max 2 trips per project). - Capabilities as follows: - Can operate up to 40nm offshore and within 40nm of port of operation. - A-frame and winch for lifting a maximum of 500 kg over the stern. - Can carry up to 10 researchers/students. - Can overnight with up to 4 researchers/students on board (plus 2 crew). - Suitable for multi-beam operations. - Suitable for ROV operations. - Includes skipper and one crew but research team are required to undertake research operations. - The following equipment is available: Benthic grab, Conductivity, Temperature, Depth meters (CTD), ROV, bongo nets, plankton pump, vertical ring nets, SBRUV. ACEP can assist in trying to source other specialised equipment providing sufficient lead-time is given.

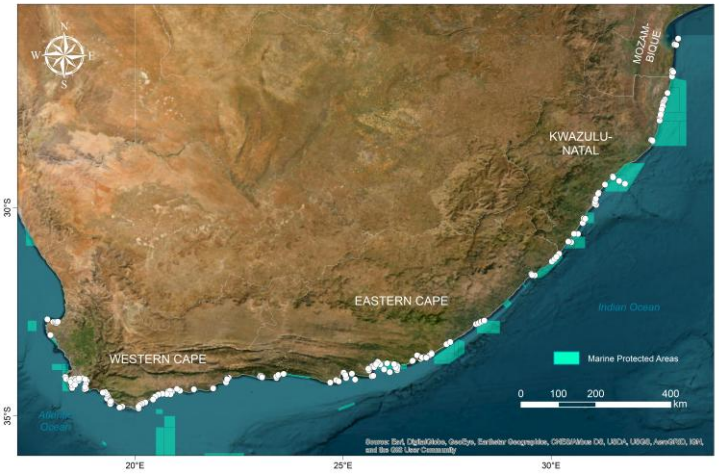
PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
	RV Phakisa Home Port: Durban Area of Operation: Richards Bay, Durban Available 2027–2029: One 21-day period per year (max two trips per project) operating from Durban or Richards Bay 	<i>RV Phakisa</i> (15 m Legacy cat) is ideal for up to 2-day trips (48 hours). She is suitable for bay-scale projects. Please note that <i>RV Phakisa</i> is NOT a ship; she has coastal craft capabilities. <i>RV Phakisa</i> will be based in Durban but will be available to be stationed in Richards Bay for one 3-week period per year per project (maximum of two trips per project). - Capabilities as follows: - A-frame and winch for lifting up to 500 kg over the stern. - Can carry up to 10 researchers/students. - Range of operation: within 40nm of port of operation. - Can overnight with up to 4 researchers/students on board. - Suitable for multi-beam operations. - Suitable for ROV operations - Includes skipper and one crew but researcher team are required to assist with operations. - The following equipment is available: Benthic grab, Conductivity, Temperature, Depth meters (CTD); ROV, bongo nets, plankton pump, vertical ring nets, SBRUV. ACEP can assist in trying to source other specialised equipment providing sufficient lead-time is given.
Marine Remote Imagery Platform	SAAB Seaeye Falcon Available 2027-2029: For use off <i>RV Phakisa</i>, <i>RV Observer</i>. Use off a 3rd Party vessel must be motivated. One 14-day trip per year (2024 - 2026) on <i>RV Phakisa</i>, <i>RV Observer</i> operating from Richards Bay, Durban, East	Two SAAB Seaeye Falcons are available, one rated for 250m depth operations and one for 750m depth operations. The SAAB Seaeye Falcon is available for use with a pilot/technician and deckhand from both ACEP vessels (<i>RV Phakisa</i> and <i>RV Observer</i>) and suitable approved third-party vessels.

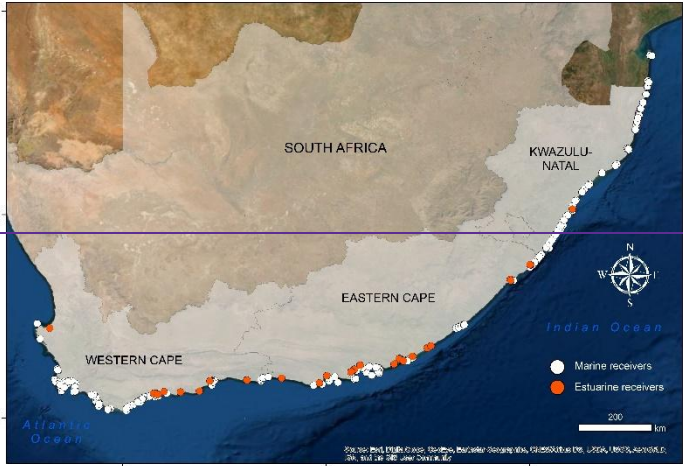
PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
(MaRIP) Platform provided by: SAIAB / ACEP / SMCRI / SAPRI	London, Port Elizabeth or Mossel Bay. Requested operations from a third-party vessel will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and must be clearly motivated for by the project applicants. A maximum of two of these trips may be applied for per project. Level of support: • Mobilisation • Footage/sample collection • Footage dissemination Please also apply for vessel time accordingly. 	The ROV platform includes the following: • Pilot/technician ○ Suitably experienced pilot and deckhand. –Applicants are not permitted to fly unless certified and competent (approved by SAIAB). ○ The applicant must provide at least one additional deckhand for operations and a team member to assist with photographs and data logging. • Data collections systems: ○ Suitable for video (HD) surveys and still (12MP) photographs. ○ Stereo-video system for transect surveys ○ Manipulator arm for specimen collections. • Data management systems: ○ All work carried out with the ROV will be managed according to SAIABs data management system. ○ A copy of all metadata and footage collected will be lodged at SAIAB and will become publicly available in 2032. • Field logistics and operations ○ The ROVs can be operated off the ACEP vessels <i>RV Phakisa</i> and <i>RV Observer</i> (live-boat to 750 m, in suitable conditions and environments). ○ If ACEP vessels are required, these must be specified and fit into the call conditions, area of operation and time allocation of the vessels. ○ Can be operated off third-party vessels (minimum 9 m with closed cabin and suitable generator and winch/davit) on anchor. (Please contact Anthony Bernard to discuss technical requirements). ○ All applications requesting extensive deep water ROV operations (>100m depth) on the south and east

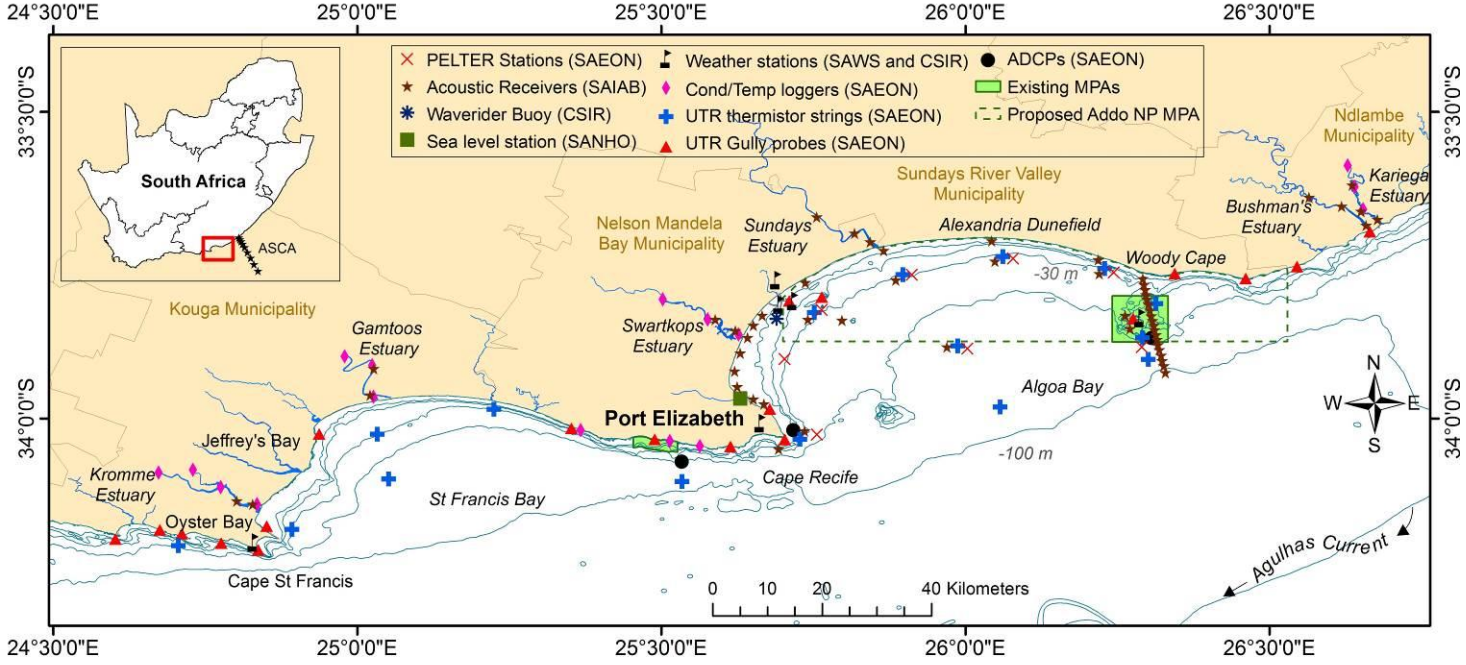
PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
		coast of South Africa will be reviewed for feasibility taking into account effect of the Agulhas Current of seafloor operations. If deep-water projects are approved, sampling success within the allotted time periods can't be guaranteed. Any team is required to discuss their proposed operations with Anthony Bernards (SAIAB Marine Platform Manager) prior to submitting their application.
	Stereo-video camera systems Available 2027– 2029: Platform includes: ○ 8.5m rigid-hulled inflatable boat with trailer – for MARIP use only – skipper provided.	Baited remote underwater stereo-video systems are used in benthic and fish monitoring and research. They can operate from estuarine environments into the deep sea. Depending on the research environment and project objectives, applicants can request access to stereo-BRUVs that best suit their needs. All camera systems can be used without bait, if required.

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
	○ Baited remote Underwater stereo-video systems (sBRUVs). Various types available: ▪ 5 x Coastal sBRUVs (<50m depth) ▪ 5 x Mesophotic sBRUVs (<150 depth) ▪ 4 x Slope sBRUV landers (<1000m depth) ▪ 5 x pelagic sBRUVs (<50m depth) – contact platform manager if deeper rated systems are required. ○ 1 x Multi-Imaging Drop camera systems (<150m depth) ○ 1 x Diver Operated Stereo-Video system (<30m depth) • Software licenses: ○ 5 x EventMeasure ○ 1 x TransectMeasure PERIOD OF SUPPORT • With technical support: One 21-day trip per year, or two 10-day trips per year during 2 of the funded years. • Without technical support: as needed depending on availability.	The multi-imaging drop camera is used to collect downwards facing phot quadrats of the seafloor and oblique stereo-video to quantify upright growth. It is primarily used for benthic and demersal invertebrate assessments. The diver operated stereo-video is used for visual census of demersal and benthic fish and habitats within safe SCUBA diving depths. It is recommended that applicants contact the platform manager to discuss their needs prior to submitting any application. Projects can request one 3-week slot or two ten-day slots per annum during two of the funded years. Projects taking place within 150km of Makhanda can request more ad-hoc access to equipment, however the timing will need to be negotiated with existing programmes. Software licences for video analysis are available for up to 4 months per year. These include 5 EventMeasure and 1 TransectMeasure licences. An 8.5 m rigid hulled inflatable boat with a trailer will be available for use with this equipment. The following should be noted: • Technical support: ○ Skipper provided for all projects using the RHIB. ○ Technician provided for all projects using landers and 8.5m RIB. ○ Technician provided for projects where research team has no experience using the requested research equipment. ○ Research teams with stereo-BRUVs experience can conduct surveys independently (motivation required).

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
		• Operation protocols: ○ To minimise the risk of equipment loss, standard operating procedures for the deployment must be adhered to. ○ For use off the applicant's own vessel ACEP will not be responsible for the logistics associated with deployment. A vessel of at least 6 m is required, fitted with a capstan winch and davit arm. Details of the proposed vessel must be provided. ○ To use this platform off an ACEP vessel (<i>uKwabelana</i>, <i>Phakisa</i>, <i>Observer</i> or <i>Hispidus</i>), the applicant must apply for time on the relevant vessel, meeting the conditions, area of operation and time availability of that vessel. ○ Each project will be assessed according to the risk of equipment loss, taking into consideration researchers' experience, operating depth, sampling location, time of year and vessel specifications. • Data management systems: ○ To ensure standardisation of data collected with the platform, the Standard Operating Procedures for data collection and management must be adhered to. ○ All footage and metadata collected with MARIP platform to be lodged with SAIAB immediately after fieldtrip. To be stored on MARIP Network Attached Storage (NAS) system. ○ Biodiversity data to be lodged with SAIAB once available. ○ Following completion of the project and embargo period, data will be published in 2029 to GBIF and OBIS.
Acoustic	Available 2027 – 2029:	ACEP supports the SAIAB Acoustic Tracking Array Platform (ATAP).

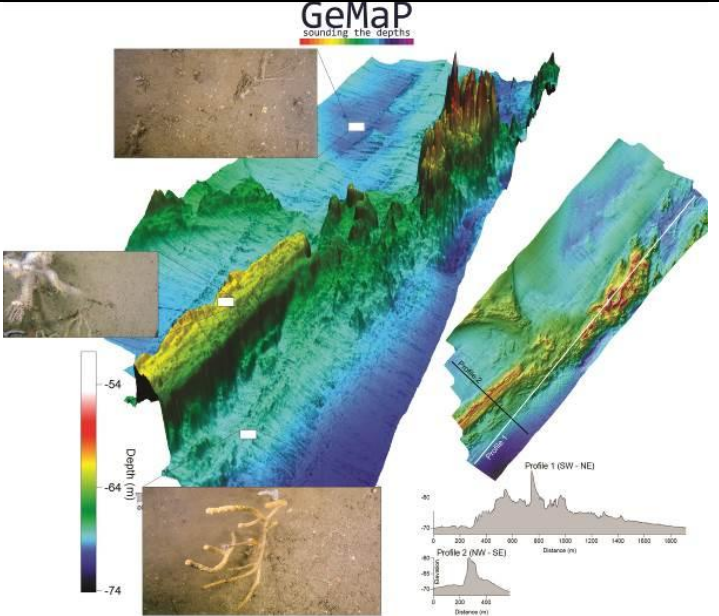
PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Tracking Array Platform (ATAP) SAIAB / ACEP	Access to SAIAB's Acoustic Tracking Array Platform (ATAP). Additional VR2W or VR2AR receivers (Innovasea, Canada) for placement at strategic locations specific to the project (number subject to feasibility and availability). https://saiab.ac.za/platforms/acoustic-tracking-array-platform/ 	This research platform gathers detection data of acoustically tagged animals on a nationwide array of acoustic receivers (Innovasea), spanning more than 2 300 km of coastline. This platform is highly collaborative in nature and comprises receivers belonging to several different organisations. Key monitoring sites include False Bay, Walker Bay, Gansbaai, Struisbaai, St Sebastian Bay, Mossel Bay, Plettenberg Bay, St Francis Bay, Algoa Bay, Port Alfred, Kei Mouth, Port St Johns, GweGwe, Durban, Umdloti, Sodwana Bay and Ponta do Ouro, and several estuaries between the Breede and Mzimvubu. Each key monitoring site comprises several acoustic receivers, generally deployed in depths ranging from ~14 m to 80+ m. Further, hourly water temperature data are collected using either HOBO temperature loggers OR via the temperature sensors in the VR2AR receivers. This makes the array ideal for longshore migration monitoring and localised studies at the core monitoring sites. The receiver network will be in place until March 2030 (i.e., current ACEP funding cycle), but the platform is planned to continue indefinitely. Projects that wish to link into this network are encouraged to apply. If required, ATAP can also supply additional receivers to assist with additional coverage at strategic locations specific to proposed projects. The number of receivers supplied will be subject to both feasibility and availability, and an ATAP receiver loan application will need to be submitted. Transmitters (i.e. tags) should be budgeted for in the project proposal. The following should be noted: • To minimise the risk of equipment loss, ATAP Standard Operating Procedures for the deployment of receivers must be adhered to. • ACEP will not be responsible for the logistics associated with additional receiver deployment. The applicant's own vessel must be used, or the application must be linked to the use of and availability (and associated conditions) of the ACEP vessels on

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
		offer namely: <i>RV Phakisa</i> or <i>RV Observer</i>. • ACEP and ATAP can provide technical advice, expertise, and training, if required. • All downloaded data will be stored and managed centrally by ATAP at SAIAB. All participants will be required to register their projects with ATAP and abide by the ATAP collaboration agreement and data management policy. • All metadata associated with the project (deployment, retrieval, download and tagging) must be submitted to the ATAP. Standardised data sheets can be provided at the onset of the project. • Detection data collected on the ATAP array (including the project-linked receivers) belong to the tag owner. Applicants are required to contact Dr Taryn Murray (ATAP Manager; TS.Murray@saiab.nrf.ac.za) to ensure all project plans conform to the objectives of the, and to avoid potential site-specific acoustic overloading.
SAEON Sentinel Sites for LTER	Access to SAEON Elwandle Node Sentinel Sites. Access to the platform includes: Access to in situ sensor data from SAEON Sentinel Sites Access to monthly CTD data from eight stations since 2010 in Algoa Bay One moored ADCP for strategic placement specific to the project in Algoa Bay or KZN-Bight in 20-30m depth and within 30nm of the harbour.	Algoa Bay and KZN-Bight Sentinel Sites for LTER ACEP supports applications to undertake research in the Algoa Bay and KZN-Bight Sentinel Sites. The Algoa Bay Sentinel Site includes over 100 in situ instruments between Port Alfred and Oyster Bay, measuring temperature, swell and currents as well as salinity (in the following estuaries: Kromme, Gamtoos, Swartkops, Sundays and Kariega). The KZN-Bight Sentinel Site includes 6 thermistor strings (3 off the Bluff and 3 off the mouth of the uThukela in 30, 60 and 80 m depth), 3 Gully UTRs and an ADCP off the Bluff. Proposals must demonstrate the need to utilize data from the existing <i>in-situ</i> equipment array (ADCP's, Gully UTRs and Thermistor strings).

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
		Applicants are advised to contact Dr Tommy Bornman (tg.bornman@saeon.nrf.ac.za) and Dr Shaun Deyzel (hp.deyzel@saeon.nrf.ac.za) to discuss the available data prior to submission of the application. and
		

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
	Algoa Bay Sentinel Site KZN Sentinel Site	

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Geophysics and Mapping Platform (GeMAP) - Multi-beam sonar – SAIAB / ACEP	Available 2027-2029. For use on <i>RV Phakisa</i> or <i>RV Observer</i>– operator provided • One 21-day survey period per year in Durban or Richards Bay (apply for time on <i>RV Phakisa</i>) • Actual number of sea days is dependent on weather • Based on a 12-hour operational day • Operational limit of 30 nautical miles from port (may be discussed on a case-by-case basis) For use on <i>RV Observer</i> – operator provided • One 21-day survey period per year in the East London, Mossel Bay, or Algoa Bay area. • Actual number of sea days is dependent on weather. • Based on a 12-hour operational day • Operational limit of 30 nautical miles from port (may be discussed on a case-by-case basis) Boat time on <i>RV Phakisa</i> or <i>RV Observer</i> should be included on the application. Level of support available: Geoscience projects: • Survey design • Data Collection (survey time up to 8hrs/day) The research team is expected to include a geoscientist to process data and produce final products. Biological/ecological projects requiring a map: • Survey design • Data Collection (survey time up to 8hrs/day)	ACEP offers a multibeam echosounder system on each of its vessels for hydrographic surveys. The systems can collect bathymetric data from 15 to 250 m (<i>RV Phakisa</i> – KZN) and 15 to 750m (<i>RV Observer</i> – Eastern Cape) water depth for the generation of digital terrain models. It is the ideal tool to survey areas of interest to provide geospatial context ahead of target selection and sampling. Using the high-resolution 3D seafloor model informed sampling strategies can be developed resulting in efficient and meaningful use of time and equipment. System specifications as follows: ○ Teledyne Seabat 7101 system including acquisition PC. ○ SBG Apogee Navsight Inertial Navigation system ○ Valeport Sound Velocity Profiler ○ QPS acquisition and processing software ○ Survey to a depth from 15 - 250 m Applicants are advised to contact Thami Wanda (T.Wanda@saiab.nrf.ac.za) to discuss system capabilities during the design phase of the project.

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
	• Data processing • Development of a bathymetry map. For use of third-party vessel: Up to 30 days per year - Operator not provided. • Subject to system availability around use on ACEP vessels. • The vessel needs to be approved for use of the equipment by the ACEP Instrument Technician. • Technical support only includes assistance with setup of instrument on vessel (excluding dimension control survey). Third party vessel expected to have in-house technical support. • The PI is responsible for hiring or appointing a suitably qualified operator. • ACEP will not cover the costs of any modifications or fittings required to accommodate the instrument on the vessel – mounting pole is not included.	 GeMap sounding the depths
SAEON Airborne Remote Sensing SAEON	Access to the SAEON Airborne Remote Sensing Platform Access to the platform includes: • Access to historical remotely sensed data products • Repeat surveys (not less than annual) of one or more estuaries (not more than 3) or a stretch of coastline not exceeding 30 nm • Observational counts from the aircraft along the coastline (not exceeding a half-day of flying) Operations to take place in uncontrolled airspace only (i.e., not near airports, military zones, etc). Please discuss with Sean Bailey se.bailey@saeon.nrf.ac.za	Remotely sensed data products The SAEON aircraft can collect high resolution RGB, infrared, thermal and LiDAR data. Flight planning, ground truthing and post-processing are very time consuming, and proposals must clearly demonstrate the need for the data, the spatial and temporal extents required, and allow for sufficient time to conduct the surveys and produce the data products. Data collected through the ACEP programme will be embargoed for the duration of the project, whereafter it will be made freely available. Aircraft detail: Aircraft type: Fixed wing, propeller Make & Model: Glasair Sportsman GS,2 Registration number: ZU-NRF Colour & pattern: White with red

PLATFORM	AREA OF OPERATION & DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC DETAILS
		and blue trim Typical flight planning statistics (example for Knysna Estuary): <u>LIDAR SETTINGS</u> Ground Speed : 100 kts / 185 kmh AGL : 727 m / 2400 ft Line spacing : 500 m Overlap : 50 % PRF : 670 kHz Scan Frq : 160 Hz Scan Angle : 70 deg Swathe width : 1018 m Band Angle : 70 deg Band Spacing : 1306 m Ave points/m : 10 Eye safety alt : 460 m / 1518 ft <u>PHOTOGRAMMETRY</u> Job Prefix :- Knysna Camera type :- Nikon D850 Pixels wide :- 8256 Pixels long :- 5504 Focal length (mm) :- 24 Pixel GSD (m) :- 0.13 Leadin dist (m) :- 1000 Extra frames :- 1 Overlap % :- 65 Sidelap % :- 25 Ground elev :- 0 Ground speed (kmh) :- 185 Strip turns (min) :- 15 Resulting parameters. Max cover (m) :- 1073 Overlap (m) :- 250 Sidelap (m) :- 804 Height(mMSL) :- 709 Interval (sec) :- 4.9 Time on site (min) :- 263 Applicants are advised to contact Dr Tommy Bornman and Mr Sean Bailey to discuss requirements prior to submission of the application. tg.bornman@saeon.nrf.ac.za and se.bailey@saeon.nrf.ac.za Applicants are advised to contact Dr Tommy Bornman (tg.bornman@saeon.nrf.ac.za) and Mr Sean Bailey (se.bailey@saeon.nrf.ac.za) to discuss requirements prior to submission of the application. and

7. TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Advanced platforms and instrumentation require skilled technical support. Technical support is provided for the following platforms:

- Coastal craft (*RV Phakisa* and *RV Observer*) – ACEP skipper and deckhand for all trips (mandatory).
- Acoustic Tracking Array Platform (ATAP) – Deployment training only.
- Stereo Baited Remote Underwater Video (SBRUV) – Deployment training only.
- Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) – ACEP operator (mandatory).
- Multi-beam sonar – ACEP Operator when used on ACEP vessels. Setup only on 3rd party vessel.
- SAEON Sentinel Site ADCP placement – ADCP setup and deployment training only.

The following technical support is included:

- Training
- Explanation of standard operating protocols
- Deployment training of acoustic receivers
- Operating (ROV & Multi-beam only) – data collection
- Data retrieval and dissemination
- Calibration

The above support requires no formal acknowledgment of the technical specialist other than recognising ACEP and platform partner in the acknowledgment section of papers. However, should the principal investigator (PI) require the technical specialist to be involved in scientific decision-making rather than solely the deployment of the instrument, then the technical specialist should be regarded as a scientific team member and be recognised appropriately e.g., paper authorship, co-supervision etc. Tasks that are outside technical support and which technical specialists are not obliged to perform without due recognition are:

- Experimental design
- Experimental design modification during cruise
- Statistical design
- Data processing or analysis
- Student supervision
- Paper writing

The inclusion of the technical specialist in the science team is entirely at the **discretion of the PI**. The relationship must be clarified prior to any cruises or equipment deployment.

8 ELIGIBILITY

8.1 Strategic alignment

As a competitive funding instrument, the chief eligibility criteria are:

- Research in the geographic region of the African Coelacanth Ecosystem
- Research that intrinsically requires the use of the ACEP coastal research platforms. By design, ACEP applications that do not require research platform access will be rejected without review
- Alignment with the STI Decadal Plan
- Alignment with the 2016 Marine and Antarctic Research Strategy⁴
- Scientific merit and quality of the research proposal
- Evidence of associated human capacity development
- As a key driver in the generation of marine spatial data and multidisciplinary data, proposals must cover as many of the following data layers as possible: oceanography, pelagic biodiversity, and benthic environment. Single-discipline research cruises will not be supported.

8.2 Applicant Eligibility

- Rated and unrated researchers can apply for three years funding (2027-2029).
- Researchers must be doing geographically appropriate research and must be employed (salaried full-time) by public research institutions that are recognised by directive of the Minister of Science and Technology. These include mainly Universities, Museums and Science Councils.
- Applicants must be requesting access to marine platform/s
- Contract employees at recognised research institutions (as defined above) in South Africa may apply, on condition their contract appointment is for (at least) the duration of the project applied for in the submission. The length of the contract should be stated in the application form. Salaries must be paid by the research institution and the primary employment of the individual concerned must be at that institution. A contract researcher appointed at a research institution on behalf of a third party to fulfill a very specific function for the latter does not qualify for support.
- Retired academics/researchers if they meet all set criteria as stipulated below: are resident in SA; are formally employed (as defined above) by
 - a recognised institution (as defined above);
 - are active researchers with a distinguished track record in research and postgraduate student supervision; and
 - are actively mentoring/training postgraduate students/young research staff.
- **Students, including PhD Candidates, are not eligible to apply in this call.** They may, however, find support for their proposed research by embedding this into applications submitted by eligible principal investigators as detailed above. ***Applications for own degree purposes will not be considered.***

⁴ 2016 DSTI Marine and Antarctic Research Strategy

- **Postdoctoral Fellows are not eligible to apply** as principal investigators in this call. They may, however, find support for their proposed research by embedding this into applications submitted by eligible principal investigators as detailed above.

8.3 Rules of participation

a) Principal Investigator

- Only researchers full-time employed at NRF recognized research institutions in South Africa (as defined above) are eligible to apply as principal investigators in this funding instrument.
- The principal investigator (i.e., the applicant/PI) must be an active researcher who takes intellectual responsibility for the project, its conception, any strategic decisions required in its pursuit, and the communication of results. The PI must have the capacity to make a serious commitment to the project and cannot assume the role of a supplier of resources for work that will largely be placed in the hands of others. S/he will take responsibility for the management and administration of resources allocated to the grant award. S/he will also take responsibility for timeously meeting all reporting requirements.
- A PI may not submit a research proposal for their own degree purposes; or on behalf of a student where the student in the main will be carrying out the research. The expectation is that individual student projects will be embedded within a larger research programme or project.

The research team may also include:

b) Co-investigators

A co-investigator is an active researcher who provides **significant** commitment, intellectual input and relevant expertise into the design and implementation of the research application. The co-investigator's role will be well defined within the scope of the application. South African-based co-investigators are eligible to receive NRF funds from the grant if the team's application is successful. **Please note that post-doctoral fellows, students, technical & support staff DO NOT qualify as co-investigators or collaborators and should not be listed as such.**

The project may also include:

c) Collaborators

Collaborators are anticipated to make a **relatively small**, but meaningful contribution to the research endeavour as outlined in the application, but who have not actively participated in the research design. They are not considered a part of the core research team and are not eligible to receive NRF funds from the grant if the team's application is successful.

9 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

9.1 Transformation, Innovation, Excellence and Sustainability for Societal Impact (TIES4I)

The NRF's strategic vision is underpinned by five pivotal success factors, namely Transformation, Innovation, Excellence and Sustainability for Societal Impact (TIES4I).

Transformation:

The NRF Vision 2030 transformation imperatives are focused on a shift towards a new and inclusive democratic society by transforming the current and future equity profiles of the South African workforce, encouraging critical discourse and advancing a knowledge economy where new knowledge enhances and facilitates the development of society, and strengthening the relationship between science and society by supporting the development of responsible, engaged citizens.

Impact:

The NRF Vision 2030 commits to making a positive, meaningful and lasting impact by supporting excellent research that extends the frontiers of knowledge and contributes to national challenges within society, the economy and the environment.

Excellence:

The NRF Vision 2030 commits to investing in quality research, capable established, newly established, emerging and next generation researchers by prioritising support for research that reflect excellence in scientific merit, ethics, originality, relevance, purpose, and/or methodological rigour alongside the potential for societal impact.

Sustainability:

The NRF Vision 2030 stresses the importance of the sustainability of the knowledge enterprise, the development of a human capital pipeline (including succession planning), as well as the sustainability of the national and global environment inter alia, by directly addressing the Sustainable Development Goals⁵ (SDG's) as detailed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

9.2 Interpreting the Scorecard

The Scorecard (Annexure 1) forms the core of the peer review process. All review panels are required to assess research proposals against a scorecard, which results in a total score for each proposal. High-scoring applications are prioritised for funding. Each criterion on the scorecard carries a weight, which influences the criterion score (Annexure 2) to the total proposal score.

The primary criteria in the scorecard are as follows:

Proposal

The review panel will assess the scientific merit and feasibility of the proposal, considering the proposed rationale, approach, methodology and literature review. The review will thus assess the potential for knowledge impact – the potential for scientific advances in understanding or interpretation. The

⁵ United Nations: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Transforming our World <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

feasibility of the proposal will in part be informed of the appropriateness of the collaborative contributions including the inclusion of Historically Disadvantaged Institutions.

This criterion score contributes 45% of the total score and is thus the most important criterion on the scorecard. The SANAP call is extremely competitive, and proposals that score an “Average” or lower for scientific merit and feasibility are not considered sufficiently competitive for funding. Only proposals that score “Above Average” and higher are further scored for inclusion into final ranking of proposals.

Equity

This refers to the equity of the applicant. This is scored according to the NRF’s pre-set equity scores which can be seen in Annexure 3.

Transformation

The review panel will consider the **student graduation history** in terms of numbers, race, gender and nationality. The panel will consider a fixed period, typically the last 5 or 10 years.

Science Engagement

The review panel will consider the proposal’s plan to engage with non-academic stakeholders. Science engagement is a mandatory element for the SANAP. Such science engagement activities should be embedded in the proposal as submitted to the NRF. The NRF supports science engagement through its coordination and implementation of the DSTI Science Engagement Strategy⁶. Within this context, science engagement refers to activities, events, or interactions characterised by **mutual learning and dialogue** among people of varied backgrounds, scientific expertise, and life experiences, who articulate and discuss their perspectives, ideas, knowledge, and values. Science engagement is an overarching term for all aspects of public engagement with science, science awareness, science education, science communication and science outreach, which aim to develop and benefit individuals and society. Engagement cannot occur in a single direction – meaningful interactions between participants are required.

Impact

The NRF Impact Framework⁷ is the key instrument for the delivery of the Impact pillar of NRF Strategy 2030. It translates strategic intent into actionable guidance for the planning, funding, and assessment of research that contributes meaningfully to both knowledge advancement and positive societal change. Complementary to this, the NRF Engaged Research Framework⁸ operationalises the Transformation and Impact pillars through the promotion of inclusive, collaborative, and context-responsive approaches. It requires researchers to actively involve societal (non-academic) stakeholders throughout the research process, to ensure relevance, uptake, and measurable societal impact. Societal impact refers to the value that research adds to society across various spheres, whether social, economic, or environmental.

⁶ DSTI Science Engagement Strategy: Science and society engaging to enrich and improve our lives

https://www.dsti.gov.za/images/Science_Engagement_Strategy_-_SES.pdf

⁷ NRF Open Access Statement. <https://www.nrf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NRF-Open-Access-Statement.pdf>

⁸ NRF Engaged Research Framework <https://www.nrf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NRF-Engaged-Research-Framework.pdf>

Societal impact reflects the direct or indirect relationship between research, or the research process, and improvement in the quality of people’s lives, inclusive of innovation, technological advancements, improved sustainability, and policy developments.

Data management and use

A formal data management plan is required. This describes the anticipated acquisition or generation of data, as well as how such data (raw and published) will be managed, described, analysed, stored and made available to other researchers or the public. Importantly, this plan will also describe the mechanisms that will be used at the end of the project **to share and preserve** such data. All data management must be in accordance with the NRF Open Access Statement (2015), available at <http://ir.nrf.ac.za/page/policies>. Applicants are encouraged to consider this statement to ensure that all elements are appropriately addressed.

9.3 Postgraduate Student Support (SA-based only)

Grantholder-linked postgraduate students are no longer allowed. The DSI-NRF Postgraduate Student Funding Policy has replaced the grantholder-linked modality and uses postgraduate student funding as a lever to address the challenges of inequity of access, success, and throughput. The policy is underpinned by the pursuit of research excellence in all its dimensions and has **transformation of the postgraduate cohort as the core objective**. Its purpose is to retain high academic achievers in the system to pursue postgraduate studies up to the doctoral level, as part of a national drive to grow the next generation of academics to sustain South Africa’s knowledge enterprise. The NRF is prioritising postgraduate students with research inclination, with the aim to grow the pool of early career researchers. Another motivation for this policy is to fast-track the development of postgraduate students in high-impact, priority, and vulnerable disciplines critical for national socio-economic development.

All postgraduate students are required to apply on the NRF Connect system at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>. A financial means test will be conducted by the Ikusasa Students Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP) and will in part determine whether postgraduate students will be funded either at Full Cost of Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS). To ensure equity of access to postgraduate studies, financially needy students (i.e., those whose combined household income is R350 000 per annum or less) and students with a disability will be funded at FCS. Academic “*high-fliers*” achieving a distinction or first-class pass will also be eligible for funding at FCS. International students as well as any other South African students who are not eligible for FCS will be eligible for PCS funding. The students are expected to meet the NRF minimum entry requirement to be eligible for FCS or PCS as illustrated in Table 1 below.

For further details on the NRF Postgraduate Funding policy, kindly refer to the framework document which is available on www.nrf.ac.za. Minimum marks for prior degree⁹, completion rates, race, gender nationality and age limits, and similar apply. These are detailed in the annual Postgraduate Funding Framework Document.

⁹ In cases where a grade is not indicated, the application will not be considered for funding by the NRF.

Table 1: Summary of eligibility criteria for NRF postgraduate funding for FCS and PCS

Study Level	Full Cost of Study (<i>South African Citizens and Permanent Residents only</i>)		Partial Cost of Study (All)
	Exceptional Achievers	Financial need Disability	Other
HONOURS	≥ 75% Mark in Final Year of study	≥ 65% Mark in Final Year of study	≥ 65% Mark in Final Year of study
	Non-South African Citizens are not eligible for Honours Scholarships Age limits apply		
MASTERS	≥ 75% Mark for Honours Completed Honours in one year	≥ 65% Mark for Honours Completed Honours in one year	≥ 65% Mark for Honours Completed Honours in one year
	Age limits apply		
DOCTORAL	≥ 75% Mark for Masters Completed Masters in two years	≥ 65% Mark for Masters Completed Masters in two years	≥ 65% Mark for Masters Completed Masters in two years
	Age limits apply		

The NRF will allocate all postgraduate bursaries under its management control as follows:

- 95% South African citizens and permanent residents.
- 5% students from SADC countries and from the rest of the world, and
- 55% women.

The NRF disaggregates these targets for South African citizens and permanent residents as follows:

- 90% Black (African, Coloured, and Indian).
- 10% White; and
- 1% students living with a disability.

Applicants are encouraged to identify postgraduate students that have a potential to complete their honours, Masters', and Doctoral degree with a minimum pass mark of 65%, and who are interested in pursuing research in the proposed project. The interested students must apply on the NRF Connect System by accessing the link: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>, and should include the reference number of your application in their applications. This will enable the identification of the students' applications for consideration for funding by the NRF. Students that are linked to NRF-funded research projects will be prioritised for funding. Having said this, however, the success of these student applications not

guaranteed. The awarding of student bursaries will depend on the available budget, and awards will be made in accordance with the NRF's key performance targets.

Grantholders may nominate their own postdoctoral fellows, but should remain cognisant of the race, gender and nationality requirements of postdoctoral fellows. Prior authorization from the NRF RIISA for foreign postdoctoral fellows is required.

10 APPLICATION PROCESSING

10.1 Application screening

All applications validated by the appropriate designated authority of the institution and submitted before deadline to the NRF via the NRF's Connect system at <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>, are screened by the NRF for compliance with the eligibility criteria and online application requirements. Without exception, applications that fail to meet the stipulated requirements will be rejected without review.

10.2 Application assessment

All eligible and appropriately completed applications are subjected to a competitive review process. The assessment of applications will be guided by a Panel Assessment Scorecard (**see Annexure 1**) and scored according to the Proposal Grading (**see Annexure 2**). The ACEP SAIAB Programme Manager will make inputs into the strategic alignment, the infrastructure and logistics feasibility.

All applications will be assessed by way of a scientific peer review panel. The NRF will select appropriate review panel members which will include specialists and other established researchers, selected based both on their respective knowledge in the field, and for their research standing. The panel meeting may be held virtually or in person. Panel members will deliberate on the submitted applications as per the scorecard using the Proposal Grading. Top scoring applications will be supported until the available resources are exhausted. The financial requirements of the top scoring applications will determine the final number of applications supported. The key performance indicators of the NRF and the transformation agenda of the country will also be taken into consideration when final funding decisions are made.

10.3 Application ranking

The purpose of the scoring system is to evaluate applications based on the strategic objectives of the funding instrument. Funding decisions for the SANAP funding instrument are informed primarily by the accumulative grading of the review panel in respect of each assessed application, as per the assessment criteria outlined in **Annexure 1**. Each criterion is weighted, giving an indication of the strategic importance of the criteria. Applications are then ranked in accordance with their overall scores. Applicants are advised to consider the assessment criteria carefully when writing their proposals.

The final funding decisions are subject to an analysis of the application's strategic alignment with government priorities, the feasibility of infrastructure usage and logistic requirements (if applicable) and financial feasibility. The NRF Key Performance Indicators as they relate to race, gender and disciplinary

and institutional spread will also inform the final funding decisions, which are subject to budget availability.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	DETAIL
ACEP	African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme
ATAP	Acoustic Tracking Array Platform
DSTI	Department of Science, Technology and Innovation
FCS	Full Cost of Study
GeMaP	Geophysics Mapping Platform
ISFAP	Ikusasa Students Financial Aid Programme
MARS	Marine and Antarctic Research Strategy
MaRIP	Marine Remote Imagery Platform
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NDP	National Development Plan Vision 2030
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSI	National System of Innovation
PCS	Partial Cost of Study
RIISA	Research Impact and Innovation Support and Advancement
ROV	Remotely Operated Vehicle
SAEON	South African Environmental Observation Network
SAIAB	South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity
sBRUV	Stereo-Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMCRI	Shallow Marine and Coastal Research Infrastructure
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
TIES4I	Transformation, Innovation, Excellence and Sustainability for Societal Impact

ANNEXURE 1: ACEP PANEL ASSESSMENT SCORECARD

Criteria	Sub-Criteria	Details	Score / 4	Weight	Weighted score
Proposal	Scientific merit and feasibility	* Does the proposed work significantly advance discovery and understanding in the field? * Is the project feasible as proposed? * Are the appropriate collaborations (including HDIs) included with clear roles and responsibilities? * Has knowledge of the relevant literature been adequately articulated?		45%	0.00
Equity	Of applicant	Race / Gender/Years post-PhD ¹⁰ .		10%	0.00
Transformation	Of students graduated	Reflect on the historical compliance with transformation for M and D graduates		10%	0.00
Science Engagement	Plans for science engagement	* Is science engagement appropriately embedded in the application? * Are the appropriate target groups identified?		10%	0.00
Impact	Wider impact	* Has the potential contribution to economic, societal, or environmental impact been appropriately embedded in the proposal? * Is it clear how such impact will be measured?		15%	0.00
Data management and use	Data storage, usage and dissemination	* Has appropriate consideration been given to data storage, usage and dissemination beyond the immediate project team? * Is the open access to all data generated by the proposed research been appropriately and comprehensively detailed?		10%	0.00
Total				100%	0.00

¹⁰ This is a preset score inserted by the NRF. See Annexure 3

ANNEXURE 2: Proposal Grading - ACEP

Score	Assessment	Assessment Descriptor
4	Exceptional	Application demonstrates evidence of exceptional performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration.
3	Excellent	Application demonstrates evidence of outstanding performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration.
2	Above average	Application demonstrates evidence of above average performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration.
1	Average	Application demonstrates evidence of average performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration.
0	Below average	Application demonstrates evidence of below average performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by panel and relative to knowledge field under consideration.
Context: Proposal grading is done with sensitivity to the context within which each application is submitted. The score of each criterion for each application will be contextualised to accommodate variability in such things as knowledge fields, institutional capacity, etc. Should a criterion not be applicable to a specific application (e.g., student graduations for early career researchers, collaboration, or similar), the weighting of that specific criteria will be made to equal zero, and the overall score normalised.		

ANNEXURE 3: PRESET EQUITY SCORES.

Equity Status	Preset Equity Score
Disabled	4
Black female; all; Black male, young ¹¹	4
Black male, not young	3
White female, young	3
White female, not young	2
White male, young	2
White male, not young	1

It should be noted that non-South African citizens, or persons without Permanent Resident status are not counted towards transformation targets. Such individuals will be scored as White females or males, young or not young, as appropriate.

¹¹ “Young” refers to 5 years post-PhD as per the applicant's CV. Applicants will be classified as “young” if their graduation date is less than 5 years prior to the date of assessment.