



National Environmental Science Programme

NESP Tropical Water Quality Hub – Call for Multi-Year Funding Proposals

Introduction

The Tropical Water Quality (TWQ) Hub, established under the National Environmental Science Programme (NESP), is calling for proposals for research projects. We are seeking proposals for projects of up to 3 years duration, with an anticipated starting date of 1 January 2016, and that provide a 1:1 co-investment (cash and/or in-kind).

This call for research funding opens **Monday 14 September 2015**.

Proposals must be completed in the pro-forma supplied, and emailed to julie.carmody@rrrc.org.au by **5:00pm (AEST) Monday 12 October 2015**.

Proposals that do not conform to all of the instructions may be excluded from consideration. This will be at the discretion of the NESP Hub Leader and Hub Administrator.

About the National Environmental Science Programme

The NESP is a 6-year (2015-2021), \$142M initiative of the Australian Government to improve our understanding of Australia's environment through collaborative world class research that delivers accessible results and informs decisions.

The NESP seeks to achieve its objective by supporting research that:

- Has a strong public good focus
- Is end-user focused and addresses the needs of the Australian Government and other stakeholders in developing evidence-based policy in improving environmental management
- Is innovative and internationally recognised
- Enhances Australia's environmental research capacity
- Is collaborative and builds critical mass by drawing upon multiple disciplines, research institutions and organisations to address challenging research and management questions
- Produces meaningful results accessible to government, industry and the community
- Includes synthesis and analysis of existing knowledge
- Builds relationships between scientists, industry, policy-makers and environmental asset managers to encourage collaborative problem solving.

Funding under the NESP has been allocated to six Hubs, each consisting of a consortium of institutional research partners, end-users and government agencies.

The Tropical Water Quality Hub is one of the six hubs funded under NESP. It has been allocated almost \$32M over 6 years (2015-2021).

The other Hubs are:

- Threatened Species Recovery
- Northern Australia Environmental Resources
- Marine Biodiversity
- Earth Systems and Climate Change
- Clean Air and Urban Landscapes

More information on these hubs can be found at <http://www.environment.gov.au/science/nesp>

About the Tropical Water Quality Hub

The Tropical Water Quality (TWQ) Hub aims to provide innovative research for practical solutions to maintain and improve tropical water quality from catchment to coast. Our key focal area is the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait regions and their associated catchments.

The six research institutions of the TWQ are:

1. James Cook University
2. CQ University
3. University of Queensland
4. Griffith University
5. CSIRO
6. Australian Institute of Marine Science

The TWQ Hub is administered by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), a not-for-profit consortium of research providers, industry and community organisations that cooperate via a strong and effective engagement network. The RRRC was established in 2006 and has previously administered major multi-year research programs such as the CRC Reef, MTSRF and NERP programs, amongst others.

The TWQ Hub is predominantly interested in water quality-related issues in fresh, estuarine and marine waters, although most funding will be allocated to projects that occur in marine waters or that affect or are relevant to marine waters (e.g. managing catchment runoff).

The geographic area of interest for the TWQ Hub is the Great Barrier Reef region (including Torres Strait) and their contributing catchments. Proposals for projects outside this area may be considered under cross-hub programs with other NESP hubs to be developed at a later date.

More information about the TWQ Hub can be found at <http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>

THE RESEARCH FUNDING CALL

Intent of this Research Funding Call

Earlier in 2015, the TWQ Hub conducted a funding call for small, short-term projects (9 months maximum). The focus of that funding call is different to the present call. The present call seeks larger research projects (up to 3 years duration) that address one or more of the stated research priorities.

Proposals should not include activities whose completion is dependent upon securing additional external funding.

Proposal Timelines

14 September 2015	Funding call opens
12 October 2015	Funding call closes - Proposals must be emailed by 5:00pm (AEST) to julie.carmody@rrrc.org.au
15 October 2015	Proposals will be reviewed by the TWQ Hub Scientific Advisory Committee and/or other relevant reviewers. Short list developed for further assessment.
21 October 2015	Proposals shortlisted by the initial review process will be assessed by the TWQ Hub Steering Committee.
16 November 2015	Research Plan with projects being recommended for funding sent to Department of the Environment for approval.

All projects must be completed by 10 December 2018 (including submission of a final report).

Projects of shorter duration are also acceptable, and welcomed.

Proposal Format

Proponents must utilise the supplied pro-forma for their application. This is available at (<http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>). Proposals in any other format will not be accepted.

Proposals must adhere to the word and page limits set within that pro-forma.

Eligibility

All applicants expecting to receive funding from a successful proposal must be current employees of one of the six partner institutions of the TWQ Hub – these being James Cook University, CQ University, University of Queensland, Griffith University, CSIRO and AIMS. Adjuncts of these institutions are eligible as long as if successful, that funding (and if applicable, their employment) is

processed through one of the partner institutions. Adjuncts are expected to supply appropriate written approval from their relevant partner institution for such an arrangement before the TWQ Hub assesses these proposals. It is expected that adjuncts who have full employment at non-partner institutions, will not be accepted under this clause (i.e. this arrangement is intended for adjuncts who do not have full employment elsewhere). Co-investigators from non-partner organisations can be named in a proposal and be part of a successful project but cannot receive NESP TWQ Hub funds, except under exceptional circumstances. Where funding is sought for staff, equipment or other services from non-partner research organisations, government entities and other related agencies, the amount sought should be modest and the necessity for this should be explained in the proposal. Applicants are responsible for receiving whatever institutional approval they will require to apply for and receive funds from this call.

There is no set limit to the number of applications an individual may be involved with but a person cannot submit more than (2) applications as a Principal Investigator or Principal Co-Investigator. It should be noted that all proposals will be reviewed by the same committees, such that excessive requesting of funds, duplication of activity, or switching of investigators to avoid the above stipulation, will not go unnoticed and may be counter-productive.

Project Funding

A total of \$6.7 million is available for projects in this funding round. It is expected that the average project size for 3-year projects will be around \$500,000 (excl. GST). The final amount offered will be at the discretion of the TWQ Hub Administrator and may be negotiated with applicants after proposal submission.

It is expected that applicants will contribute to their project at a ratio of 1:1. That is, for each dollar requested, the applicants must contribute an additional dollar to the project. Cash contributions are preferred, however, the matching contribution does not have to be cash, and in-kind contributions should be clearly specified. Matching contributions are auditable elements of a project so records or rationale to substantiate these contributions should be retained.

It should be noted that NESP funding is Category 1 (Australian Competitive Grants) for universities. It is expected that projects will be budgeted as per other Category 1 funding programs (i.e. 1.3 multiplier for salaries and no institutional overheads can be claimed).

Applicants should budget appropriately for communication and stakeholder engagement activities. The NESP places a strong emphasis on working closely with end-users during the course of the project, not merely informing them of the results at the project completion. Each project should nominate at least two agencies (or individuals from those agencies if possible), that they will work with closely during the project.

Except under exceptional circumstances, funding can only be spent within Australian territory. Expenses occurring outside Australian territory should be verified with the TWQ Hub Administrator.

Future TWQ Hub Funding Opportunities

The TWQ Hub will have additional research funding calls in 2016 and in subsequent years for multi-year projects. These will be broadly similar in structure to the current call, though the research priorities may vary.

Proposal Assessment

All proposals will be initially reviewed by the TWQ Hub Scientific Advisory Committee that provides recommendations to the TWQ Hub Steering Committee. The Scientific Advisory Committee consists of senior research scientists with extensive relevant experience in the region who will be required to comply with a strict conflict of interest protocol. The Steering Committee consists of representatives of end-user organisations and agencies. They will be especially looking to see that projects provide useful, adoptable outcomes.

Proposals will be reviewed by the 21 October 2015 by the TWQ Hub Scientific Advisory Committee and the TWQ Hub Steering Committee, and the selected list sent to the Department of the Environment for their review and ratification. It is planned that successful applicants will be informed by Nov-Dec 2015, allowing for a January 2016 start date. Due to the large number of applications expected, unsuccessful applicants will not be able to receive feedback as to why their application was not funded.

Proposal Assessment Criteria

The criteria by which all proposals will be assessed, and their weighting, are provided in a separate document (see <http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>).

Eight criteria are utilised by the Department of the Environment in their assessment of proposals, and are listed verbatim below.

1. What practical and tangible outcomes will the project deliver?
2. What management action will be able to be taken as a consequence of the delivery of this project?
3. What trial programmes to improve the physical environment will be conducted?
4. How will this research improve the environment and how will this be measured?
5. Does the project align with an identified high priority need?
6. What other research or management investment will the project leverage?
7. Does the project leader have a positive track record in delivering previous research projects, including timely delivery of outputs, administrative requirements and data and metadata?
8. Can the project be delivered on time and within budget?

The first four of these criteria are specific questions on the proposal pro-forma.

Three additional criteria that will be used in the assessment process by the Hub Committees are:

1. How directly useful is the project in addressing the ability to maintain and improve the condition of aquatic environments in the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait regions and/or engage various sectors of the community in those goals?
2. Does the project represent value for money?
3. Does the project provide for appropriate end-user/stakeholder engagement?

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that projects are expected to deliver tangible benefits for improved environmental on-ground outcomes. Examples of these include: new management practices; changes or improvements to existing management practices; improved efficiency and delivery of on-ground monitoring, restoration and management programs; alter social and/or economic barriers to adoption of, or changes to, environmental management practices and attitudes; increased indigenous participation in co-management of country and access to livelihood opportunities based on that role.

Although collaboration, especially across institutions, is encouraged, and is one of the goals of the NESP as a whole, in this particular funding round, it is not a formally assessable criterion.

End-User Engagement Expectations

End-user engagement is a core value of the NESP TWQ Hub program. End-user management questions have been incorporated into the NESP TWQ research priorities to provide focus for the research partners to further engage and develop research proposals. It is expected that either end-users or researchers can initiate the development of research proposals. Strong end-user engagement will be assessed against the following criteria. Research will not be funded if end-user support is not demonstrated.

End-users are defined as those individuals, groups, indigenous communities, NGO's, government agencies or organisations that will have responsibility for decision making, influence or on-ground implementation based on the outputs/outcomes of the project.

1. Key end-users must be engaged as partners in TWQ NESP projects from inception.
2. Research proposals must clearly describe the management/end-user questions being addressed.
3. The process for end-user engagement must be designed to meet the needs of the end users and research team for each project.
4. Research proposals must identify how outcomes will contribute to delivering Long Term Sustainability Plan outcomes.
5. Research proposals should clearly demonstrate the end-user 'stake' in the project (cash/in-kind/vested interest).
6. Strategic risks for researchers and end-users should be identified in the project proposal.
7. Project milestones must incorporate end-user needs.
8. Proposals must demonstrate how public release of research outcomes will be coordinated with the TWQ Hub and end-users.

Filling Out an Application

The supplied pro-forma (available at <http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>) must be used for a project application. If the stipulated word limit is adhered to, the full application should be no more than 10 pages. Additional pages will not be considered.

Several of the text boxes stipulate the use of dot points – please follow these instructions.

Project Title (and keywords)

Please keep the project title brief, but informative and tightly related to the proposal contents.

Please also provide 5 key words that describe the project, that will aid later reporting and search functionality.

Project Personnel

Each proposal should explicitly identify the Principal Investigator (only one PI per proposal) and those staff who will draw salary from the project. The name and institution of all major investigators should be included here. Under NESP contracts, only those staff listed as Specified Personnel in the contract should draw salary from the project. Thus, any personnel expected to draw a salary from the project, including technical staff (where known) should also be listed by name. Additional personnel taken on during the project can be added as Specified Personnel to the contract in writing at a later date.

Project Budget

The first table lists the cash being requested from the NESP TWQ Hub and the cash and in-kind contributions of all partners involved in the project.

The subsequent tables require the portion of the project budget that is to be allocated to each partner institution to be listed separately. This is because this money will be directly contracted by the RRRC to each recipient partner institution (i.e. project funds will not be passed to the lead partner for subsequent distribution to the other partner institutions). Additional tables can be copied in where required for additional recipient partners.

Care should be taken when deciding on budgetary items and the relative allocations between each. Under NESP contracts, received funds can only be transferred between categories of expenditure (e.g. from operating to salary) without written permission, where the transfer is less than 10% of the value in that category, or less than \$50,000, whichever is the lesser of the two. Successful proposals will be asked for more detailed budgets, and also for milestones, during the contracting process.

Portions of awarded grants may not be sub-contracted without written permission from the Department (if the requirement for a sub-contract is known at the time of writing, this should be mentioned therein).

Project Summary

This is a concise 100-word summary of the proposed project that should cover why the project is important, its relevance to end-users and its outcomes.

This summary may be used (including verbatim) for promotional and informational processes, including by the Department of the Environment, so should be carefully worded for such purposes.

Project Rationale

A brief, concise description of the proposed project and why it is necessary. For most proposals, this will include background as to how the need for this project arose and the gap that it fills.

Please also provide a clear statement of the specific problem being addressed and what solution this research will provide.

Which TWQ Hub Priorities Does this Project Address?

The research priorities for the current round are provided at <http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>. These are based on consultation with end-users. Applicants should describe which of these priorities the proposal addresses.

Please also provide (if you are aware)

- What other government policy objectives, management plans, recovery plans and/or conservation strategies this project addresses.
- What previous research does this proposal build upon/leverage off and how is it different to that research
- Links to other projects and NESP Hubs (where known) – formal and informal

Project Objectives and Outcomes

Briefly outline what the project aims to achieve. As it is a critical selection criterion, this section should also provide specific mention of how the project will introduce, alter or improve management practices or policy.

Project Milestones

List at least 2 tangible and quantifiable milestones per year.

It is likely that the milestones and their suggested due dates will be negotiated by RRRRC with successful applicants prior to contracting, to ensure consistency across the range of projects being contracted.

Location of the Research

Please describe the approximate location of any on-ground work, and/or the approximate location the research output will impact upon.

For funded projects, a link will be provided to map this location and this information will be included in a Departmental spatial database.

Summary of Methods

Briefly outline the methods that will be applied during this project. This will describe the research being conducted.

Management Outcomes

These four management outcome questions are from the project assessment criteria provided by the Department of the Environment. These criteria will be used by the Department in their evaluation of project proposals.

End-User/Stakeholder Engagement

End-users consulted in the development of this proposal (where relevant) and the targeted end-users for the project outcomes must be listed. It is critically important that applicants identify relevant end-users and stakeholders (including email addresses), and demonstrate how they will bring them along during the course of their project. Merely informing end-users of the project and its results (e.g. via fact sheets or website) is unlikely to be sufficient in itself.

Please do not provide letters of support – they will not be sent to the Hub Scientific Advisory or Steering Committees as part of their review process.

The TWQ Hub has developed a *Knowledge Brokering and Communication Strategy*, which can be found at <http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>

Research End-Users and Key Stakeholders

It is expected that applicants will identify at least two end-users of their research who have been involved in the preparation of this proposal or will be involved with, or receive information from the project during its term. These end-users may be contacted during the application assessment process. They will also be sent project material throughout the course of the project (e.g. milestone reports). At least one of the identified end-users must be from within the Department of the Environment.

Co-Contributors

List those external organisations that are contributing to the project and the nature of their contribution. These may overlap with identified end-users.

Extension Activities, including Indigenous Engagement

Outline how the project outcomes will be communicated to broader audiences and identify target audiences. Please list all planned outputs, including communication and promotional material.

Apart from government, industry and community groups, Indigenous people are key end-users and project partners. Not all projects will require Indigenous engagement (e.g. lab-based studies) but those that do should describe their intended approach. It is expected that all projects that can incorporate Indigenous involvement, will do so. All field studies for example, should, at a minimum, request permission for access to country from relevant traditional owners and share their findings with them. In many cases, it would be appropriate to involve (and compensate) traditional owners and/or Land and Sea Rangers in this field work and wherever possible, this should be included. The TWQ Hub can assist in the engagement process. Ensure this is considered in your budget.

The TWQ Hub has developed an *Indigenous Engagement and Participation Strategy*, which can be found at <http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>

Planned Outputs and Data and Information Management

List planned outputs from the project, including communication and promotional material, and explain how these will be distributed and made available.

Please also briefly list all datasets and data products that will be collected or generated during this project, outline the timing of collection, the repository on which the data will be published, the expected date of publishing and the metadata standard that will be used. Note that all TWQ Hub projects will be expected to submit relevant project information to the e-atlas (www.eatlas.org.au) the approved data repository for the TWQ Hub. At a minimum, submission of project description information, relevant photos and all project metadata to the e-atlas will be required contractually, though submission of raw data is also encouraged. Data and Accessibility Guidelines for the NESP are available from <http://www.environment.gov.au/science/nesp/publications/nesp-data-accessibility-guidelines>

Research Capability Relative to this Project

This is one of the project assessment criteria.

The track record should briefly explain the Principal Investigators' and co-investigators research standing, their ability to deliver high level research projects, engage with stakeholders and their experience in conducting projects of relevance to the mission of the NESP TWQ Hub. Links to their personal on-line profiles would assist brevity (but please don't make this the only information provided in this box).

Inclusions/Exclusions

Briefly list items/achievements/activities that are within or out of scope of the project.

Project Risks and Constraints

Please provide a statement to highlight the significant risks and constraints to the project.

Examples include: bad weather precluding sampling, not being able to access information or data critical for a desktop study etc.

Verification

All statements made in the funding application may be subject to verification during the application review process. This includes statements about which end-users have been consulted and the institutional support and institutional employment status of applicants.

Other Information

Data retention and sharing: NESP funding agreements require all research outputs to be made publicly available under the latest Creative Commons framework. In addition, all projects will be expected to submit relevant project information to the e-atlas (www.eatlas.org.au) the approved

data repository for the TWQ Hub. At a minimum, submission of project description information, relevant photos and all project metadata to the e-atlas will be required contractually, though submission of raw data is also encouraged. Data and Accessibility Guidelines for the NESP are available from <http://www.environment.gov.au/science/nesp/publications/nesp-data-accessibility-guidelines>

All written outputs (reports and information products will be posted on at least the NESP TWQ Hub website). All projects will be required to submit at least one final report in a template supplied by RRRC. After format checking, addition of appropriateness for consistency of appearance and Departmental notification, these reports will be uploaded to the NESP TWQ Hub website. It is expected that researchers will take all reasonable steps to deposit research outputs into appropriate institutional repositories. The RRRC will issue ISBNs to technical reports, final reports and other suitable publications and will legally deposit these into the applicable National and State Libraries.

It is expected that project leaders will familiarise themselves with the details of the contracts between the RRRC and their institution. Those contracts will reflect the details in the head contract between the Department of the Environment and the RRRC.

Further Information

For further information, visit <http://rrrc.org.au/nesp/>

For enquiries regarding this funding call, email julie.carmody@rrrc.org.au

This document was updated 14 September 2015.