Foras na Mara
Marine Institute

# NATIONAL MARINE RESEARCH VESSELS

## VESSEL CHARTER GUIDELINES 2027 - 2028

# INTRODUCTION

The Marine Institute operates the national marine research fleet (RV *Celtic Explorer, RV Tom Crean, Dulra na Mara* and ROV *Holland I*) on behalf of the Irish Government and the Irish marine community, on a charter basis. The Research Vessels Operations (RV Ops) team within the Marine Institute manage and monitor all aspects of ship-time scheduling to ensure the efficient operation and implementation of all survey programmes in the research fleet's schedules.

The call for vessel charters for **2027 and 2028 is now open** and we are inviting organisations to apply for ship-time, for research, development or monitoring purposes.

> *Further information including technical specifications on the Marine Institute's Research Vessels is available on our website.*

The following provides information on the terms of vessel charter and the application procedure.

Please Note:

- **Applicants may seek grant-aid to cover all or part of the vessel charter costs for Research Surveys or Ship-Based Training Programmes.**
- **For information on eligibility for grant-aid and additional application requirements please click here:**
- **Applications for grant-aid are being accepted for 2026 (*Celtic Explorer*, *Tom Crean & Dulra na Mara*).**

**CLOSING DATE** for Receipt of Ship-time Applications:

**15:00 Friday 19th June 2026**

# 1. WHEN APPLYING FOR SHIP-TIME, PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING POINTS

1.1 Ship-time requests for the RV *Celtic Explorer*, RV *Tom Crean* and RV *Dulra na Mara** for 2027 and 2028 must be submitted via 'Marine Facilities Planning' system, MFP. Please click on 'Request an account' on the MFP homepage. Ship-time applications will only be considered on the basis of completed applications being submitted by **15:00 Friday 29th May 2026.**

*For Dulra na Mara ship-time applications must be submitted by **15:00 Saturday October 31st 2026**, please email RV Operations to inquire on the vessels availability prior to submitting an application in the Marine Facilities Planning system.

1.2 Co-operative survey/training programmes, involving a range of scientific disciplines that maximise the usage of vessel time, will be more favourably regarded. When completing the MFP application form, please bear in mind the following:

- Application Form should be completed in full.
- Please provide as much information as possible.
- Clearly demonstrate the objectives of the proposed survey programme. Commitments to international organisations such as ICES should be mentioned and relevant information provided, this should not be confined to general statements such as 'contribution towards scientific knowledge'.
- Please attach a preliminary survey programme including a work schedule and any relevant maps outlining the proposed survey area.
- **Applicants applying for grant-aid to cover vessel charter costs must refer to the Grant-Aid Guidelines for additional requirements. These are available to download from** the Ship Time Programme 2027 page on the Marine Institute Website.

1.3 Users should always bear in mind that vessel transits over a working year can take a considerable amount of time and expense and users should consult with colleagues who may wish to work within the same geographical area to increase operational efficiency of the vessels.

1.4 While the Marine Institute will always endeavour to give each vessel user the timeslot requested, this is not always possible. A detailed ship-time schedule will be drawn up and circulated in late 2026 for the 2027 survey year and in 2027 for the 2028 survey year. Vessel users will be asked to confirm via MFP that they are satisfied with the timeslot allocated to them. Once agreed, any changes from original requests cannot be guaranteed.

1.5 All non-commercial users of the Marine Institute's research vessels will be charged a daily rate during 2027 and 2028 as per the table below. Note: *Costs may be revised in 2027*.

| **Vessel** | **Celtic Explorer** | **Tom Crean** | **Dulra na Mara** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Daily Rate** | €22,500* | €18,500* | €2,500* |

*Vessels Daily Rates 2027/2028*

*These rates are provisional and may be subject to update based on vessel operating costs

The daily rate will cover the cost of crewing, basic equipment requirements, victualling and fuel**. Users will be charged for any additional costs (e.g. cranage or transportation costs) incurred by the Marine Institute whilst preparing for or undertaking the survey. These additional charges will be passed on to the client at cost.

**Users are advised that the Celtic Explorer and Tom Crean's normal mode of operation is with one main engine operating in "silent mode". This is the most fuel-efficient mode of operation for passage and survey. A second engine can be employed at the master's discretion in inclement weather to maintain a minimum speed of 7/8 Knots during passage and as required during trawling operations, and in the event of an emergency. If vessel users require vessel speeds in excess of that available above, this should be flagged with RV Ops in advance. If increased passage speeds beyond those highlighted above are required during the course of a survey the Chief Scientist should discuss with the master who will discuss with shore-based management.

*Note: The day rates above are based on a "normal" fuel price and in the case of elevated fuel costs the costs above may be increased in line with prevailing market rates for fuel*

**Please note the following Terms and Conditions for users of the R.V. Celtic Explorer and R.V. Tom Crean:**

- **In the event of adverse weather, the full day rate will apply.**
- **In the event of user equipment failure, the full day rate will apply.**
- **In the event of any force majeure event, including but not limited to acts of God, fire, epidemics, war (declared or undeclared), and any other cause beyond reasonable control, the full day rate will apply.**
- **For Marine Institute funded surveys due to the nature of the vessel pricing structure the full daily rate will apply in the event of vessel mechanical failure or unavailability.**
- **Normally, 24 hours is allotted at the start of each survey to allow sufficient time for mobilisation which includes; loading and installation of vessel and user equipment, crew changes, bunkering, refuelling and other maintenance activities as required. Depending on the equipment requirements for the survey additional mobilisation days may be required and this can be agreed at pre cruise planning phase.**
- **24 hours is allotted at the end of each survey to allow sufficient time for demobilisation which includes; loading and installation of vessel and user equipment, crew changes, bunkering, refuelling and other maintenance activities as required.**
- **Users may be required to accommodate the mobilisation of equipment for the next user during their demobilisation day in order to help minimise mobilisation times.**
- **Mob/demob times may vary depending on nature of survey and other required mobilisation activities.**
- **While efforts will be made to facilitate early departure and/or late arrival, this cannot always be guaranteed and users should plan accordingly.**
- **Surveys on the RV *Celtic Explorer* exceeding 30 days will have one 24hr port call; this has been included in the above rate.**
- **Surveys on the RV *Tom Crean* exceeding 21 days will have one 24hr port call; this has been included in the above rate.**

# 2. OPERATIONAL INFORMATION

2.1 Equipment requirements should be clearly indicated and limited to those actually needed. Allocation of certain items of equipment will be at the Marine Institute's discretion. Modification to, or unauthorised use of, equipment is forbidden. Vessel users should consult with Research Vessel Operations well in advance of a programme in order to ensure that requirements are clearly understood. Please note that vessel users' equipment and third-party equipment used by the vessel user is carried and operated on the vessels at the equipment owner's risk.

2.2 When planning a programme, scientists must bear in mind that the services supplied by the vessel and associated personnel are not unlimited and should be confined to a purely support role. **Non-vessel equipment logistics are the responsibility of the scientist.**

2.3 If there is an intention to deploy any type of mooring equipment the Chief Scientist should submit a detailed description of the mooring rig and the proposed nature and location of deployment to the Research Vessel Operations 3 months in advance of the programme. The Chief Scientist should also arrange to have appropriate Marine Notices circulated. This can be done by contacting the Maritime Safety Directorate, Dept. of Transport and Marine (http://www.dttas.ie/maritime). A Maritime usage licence from MARA may be required for certain deployment activities and it will be the responsibility of the applicant to secure an appropriate licence if applicable.

2.4 If it is intended to carry out research on-board the vessel in foreign waters, **a minimum notification of 7 months must be given**. An 'Application for the Consent to Conduct Marine Scientific Research in foreign waters' must be completed. Forms can be obtained by contacting Research Vessel Operations or downloading them from the Marine Institute website.

2.5 If it is intended to carry out research within the boundaries of the offshore marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), vessel users must complete an application for marine scientific research within the Offshore SACs which is available from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (and on the MFP system). Applicants must also be aware of the possible requirement to complete a notifiable action form or to seek clearance for certain activities within the inshore SACs. Please contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service for further information on the exact locations of the sites and the details of the specific nature of the protected habitats and for permission to carry out marine scientific research within these areas.

2.6 Since July 2023 the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, or MARA, have the responsibility for licencing certain survey activities in Irish waters (within the area outlined below, see Figure 1). A maritime usage licence may be required for certain surveys and researchers should discuss these requirements with the Research Vessel Operations team at the time of submitting their ship time application.

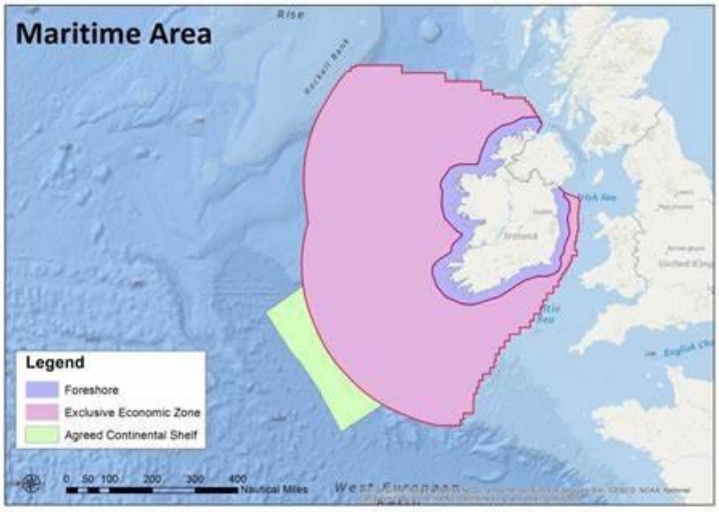


Figure 1. Ireland's Maritime Area

2.7 If it is intended to use seismic equipment or multi-beam or acoustic survey equipment in any bays, estuaries or inlets then the vessel users must refer to the NPWS' Guidance to Manage the Risk to Marine Mammals from Man-made Sound Sources in Irish Waters. This may require risk assessment of your operations and use of mitigation procedures during your survey. MARA may also require the above guidance to be adhered to for certain surveys beyond the areas above, and this will be outlined in the maritime usage licence terms.

# 3. THE HOLLAND 1 DEEPWATER ROV

The Marine Institute operates a 3000m rated deepwater ROV system. The ROV can be operated from the *Celtic Explorer* and the *Tom Crean* and may also be operated from other appropriate vessels, subject to Research Vessel Operations' approval.

All users of the Marine Institute's ROV will be charged a daily rate during 2027/28 as per the table below.

| ROV | Service |
|---|---|
| €13,000*** | Research Operations |
| €15,000 | Mob/De Mob |

*ROV Daily Rates*

***this is an estimate. The final daily rate will be based on the level of use of the ROV and the review of final operating costs.

*For further information and technical specifications: Marine Institute's Deepwater ROV*

# 4. MARINE INSTITUTE GLIDERS

The Marine Institute operates a fleet of TWR Slocum gliders which are available to the user community for Oceanographic surveys. The gliders can be operated from the Celtic Explorer or Tom Crean and may also be operated from other vessels as deemed appropriate by the Marine Institute. The system is capable of operating for up to 60 days autonomously whilst collecting CTD and other oceanographic data between depths of 25m to 1000m depending on configuration.

*For further information contact infrastructures@marine.ie*

Requests for the Marine Institute glider fleet in 2026 must be submitted using the following Microsoft form: Marine Institute Glider application – 2027 survey period.

# 5. DULRA NA MARA

The *Dulra na Mara* is a versatile 12-meter research boat which can take up to 12 passengers and can operate for 12 hrs, making it an ideal vessel for student training. It is designed for a wide range of scientific operations, including oceanographic sampling; beam trawling; benthic research; ornithology and marine mammal observing; side scan sonar operations, drop camera and mini ROV deployments.
Equipped with a winch and a 1.5 Ton A-frame allows for efficient deployment and retrieval of sediment sampling gear, ensuring high-quality data collection for geological and environmental studies. The vessel will primarily be based out of Galway docks but can work out of other locations.

# 6. CHIEF SCIENTISTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 The Chief Scientist will receive a copy of the Vessel User Guidelines upon allocation of ship time, and it is his/her responsibility to ensure that each member of the scientific complement reads them. Each member of a scientific party will receive a copy of the vessel user guidelines on completion of

inputting their personal details on MFP ahead of a survey start date. Each scientist must indicate that they have read and agree to abide by the guidelines on completion of the scientist details page within the scientist portal on MFP. Copies of the guidelines are also available on-board the vessel.

6.2 A Safety Familiarisation briefing will take place on board the vessel before each survey commences. It is the Chief Scientist's responsibility to ensure that each member of the scientific complement attends.

6.3 The Chief Scientist should ensure that all scientific personnel have undergone a medical assessment in accordance with the ENG 11 or equivalent STCW medical standard for those working at sea and that all scientists present their original up-to-date ENG 11 certificate on boarding the vessel. A list of certified medical practitioners who undertake the ENG11 medical can be found at the following link.

**If a scientist joining the survey is pregnant, she must obtain doctor's clearance to participate in the survey, which should include details of work involved and distance from the shore.** According to the 'Seafarer Medical Examination System' "The employment of pregnant workers at sea should be prohibited after the 28th week of pregnancy".

6.4 The chief scientist should also ensure that all scientists intending to sail on the survey complete the medical declaration section within the scientists portal in MFP. Further information may be sought by RV Ops depending on the nature of any highlighted medical issues.

6.5 The Chief Scientist should ensure that all scientific personnel have completed a Personal Sea Survival Techniques course (STCW 95 compliant) before participating on scientific programmes. Details of organisations offering personal survival techniques courses can be obtained by contacting Research Vessel Operations or downloaded at the following link.

6.6 All scientists joining the Celtic Explorer and Tom Crean will be required to undertake training in Ship's Security Awareness. This certificate is valid for life and details of an online provider of this course will be circulated by RV Ops.

6.7 In the event of proposed use of any hazardous materials/chemicals the Chief Scientist should advise the Vessel Manager in writing and ensure that appropriate transport, storage and usage methods are adhered to. The Chief Scientist should upload the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) to their survey on MFP and bring two copies of each SDS on-board during mobilisation - one copy for the bridge and one for the chemical laboratory. A risk assessment may need to be provided depending on the nature of the chemicals /gases being utilised onboard.

6.8 The Chief Scientist should be aware of the **crewing requirements** for each vessel and take these into account when preparing sailing instructions.

> **Note: In the event of a global Pandemic or similar health emergency a smaller scientific complement may be specified for each vessel, and this will be communicated to all chief scientists.**

The **Celtic Explorer** can accommodate a total of 35 people; the crewing requirements for various activities are given below.

| Type of Survey | Crew | Scientists |
|---|---|---|
| Passive Survey[1] | 13 | 20 |
| Fishing Survey | 15-19 | 16-20 |
| ROV Survey[2] | 21-22 | 13-14[3] |

*Celtic Explorer Crewing Requirements*

The **Tom Crean** can accommodate a total of 26 people; the planned crewing requirements for various activities are given below:

| Type of Survey | Crew | Scientists |
|---|---|---|
| Passive Survey | 12 | 13 |
| Fishing Survey | 12/13 | 11/13 max |

*Tom Crean Crewing Requirements*

*For **student training cruises** up to 12 students/scientists can be accommodated (without medical or additional training certification).*

*Surveys requiring **deck operations at night may** require additional crew. Applicants are asked to be as specific as possible in detailing the amount of deck operations required over a 24hr period to allow Research Vessel Operations to determine the exact crewing requirements.*

6.9 In the event of any difficulty, or reason for complaint while on board, the Chief Scientist should first address this to the Master of the vessel. In all other circumstances the scientist should contact Research Vessel Operations in the first instance at rv@marine.ie and should refer to the Vessel User Guidelines for information.

6.10 Cruise Summary Report (CSR): To ensure the appropriate curation of all data generated on the research vessels, Chief scientists are obliged to complete a cruise summary report utilising the onboard "MIKADO" software package before departing the vessel.

6.11 The Chief Scientist will be asked to complete a Post Cruise Assessment Form on completion of the cruise. The MFP will remind the Chief Scientist to log on and complete this form. A post cruise report must also be submitted to Research Vessel Operations on completion of the cruise via MFP.

6.12 Researchers are asked to furnish a **Cruise Report** on the research survey to the Marine Institute. This must be submitted, within three months of completion of the survey, digitally and in hard-copy, using a template provided by the Marine Institute. Users are also asked to submit a shapefile or csv file with detail of data acquired in the course of a survey also following survey completion. If deemed suitable, the Cruise Report, or a Synthesis Report, may be published by the MI.

[1] Passive survey is a survey which requires a limited amount of deck operations.
[2] Crewing depends on the nature of the ROV survey.
[3] Detailed crew and scientist numbers will be confirmed prior to survey.

# 7. APPLICATION PROCEDURE & CLOSING DATE

Applications for vessel charter for the RV *Celtic Explorer*, RV *Tom Crean* and RV *Dulra na Mara* must be submitted using the online Marine Facilities Planning (MFP) system.

Applications for the Marine Institute glider fleet must be submitted via the following Microsoft form: Marine Institute Glider application – 2027 survey period.

**CLOSING DATE for Receipt of Ship-time Applications*:**

**15:00 Friday 19th June 2026**

**NOTE:**

***R.V. *Dulra na Mara* applications close on 15:00 Saturday 31st October 2026**

Applicants applying for **grant-aid** to cover vessel charter costs should note the **two-step** procedure involved in this and the need to complete the MFP application in sufficient time as the Application Code is required in order to apply for grant-aid. Refer to the Grant-Aid Guidelines for information.