

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)

Customer: Defra

Dear Supplier,

We would like to notify you of an upcoming requirement, and by doing so we are keen to understand where the market stands in terms of our requirement below.

This Request for Information (RFI) seeks information relating to contracting a data management partner with marine expertise to support the operation of the Marine Environmental Monitoring and Assessment National Database - Plus (MERMAN+) (v2.0)

Please note the following general conditions:

- This RFI will help us to refine the requirements.
- We reserve the right not to proceed with a further competition. Nothing shall constitute a commitment to ordering unless we undertake a further competition that results in the award of a Call-Off Contract.
- Should a Call-Off Agreement be awarded following a further competition, the Potential Provider agrees to supply the services in accordance with the Call-Off Terms contained within the Technology Services 3 Agreement (RM6100).
- Any and all costs associated with the production of such a response either to a RFI or a further competition must be borne by the Supplier. We will not contribute in any way to meeting production costs of any response.
- Information contained within this document is confidential and must not be revealed to any third party without prior written consent from us.
- No down-selection of Potential Providers will take place as a consequence of any responses or interactions relating to this RFI.
- We expect that all responses to this RFI will be provided by Potential Providers in good faith to the best of their ability in the light of information available at the time of their response.
- No information provided by a Potential Provider in response to this RFI will be carried forward, used or acknowledged in any way for the purpose of evaluating the Potential Provider, in any subsequent formal procurement process.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Marine Environmental Monitoring and Assessment National Database - Plus (MERMAN+) (v2.0) is the recently revised data repository that stores quality-assured

marine environmental data collected by seven UK Competent Monitoring Authorities (CMAs) under the Clean Seas Environmental Monitoring Programme (CSEMP), coordinated by the Clean Safe Seas Evidence Group (CSSEG). It is owned by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and co-sponsored by Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

MERMAN+ data are used to fulfil statutory reporting obligations under the UK Marine Strategy (UKMS) Regulations 2010 and mandatory reporting obligations under the Oslo Paris Convention 1992 (OSPAR). OSPAR commitments are met through the annual onward submission of MERMAN+ data to the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). MERMAN+ data are also submitted to European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) Chemistry to support European marine data initiatives.

MERMAN+ is a new iteration of MERMAN (v1.0). It is owned by Defra and was released in May 2024. It was designed to:

- allow the system to incorporate new data types,
- respond effectively to changes in ICES submission requirements,
- be interoperable with other marine data systems, and
- streamline data validation processes.

The role of the MERMAN data manager has been fulfilled by a single supplier since 2006. This procurement process is intended to source a supplier to continue to manage the MERMAN+ system over the next contract period in compliance with Public Contract Regulations.

OUR AIMS – WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

The Customer is looking for one or more Suppliers to deliver the following aims:

The aim of this contract is to provide data management services to MERMAN+ to facilitate data submissions that fulfil mandatory international and statutory national reporting obligations.

The objectives are to provide:

- Marine science expertise to the management of marine data, ensuring quality assurance and compliance with marine (meta)data standards as required by the Clean and Safe Seas Evidence Group (CSSEG) and in collaboration with the Marine Environmental Data and Information Network (MEDIN).
- Coordination of CMAs for data submissions according to the specified timelines.
- Assist data providers by running the MERMAN+ helpdesk.
- Annual training workshops for data users and associated reference materials.

- Maintenance and development of MERMAN+ webpages
- Organisation of MERMAN+ Focus Group meetings with CMAs and Defra and collaboration with the system developer to identify opportunities for improvements to the system, data flow and scientific processes.

PROCUREMENT DETAILS

- The MERMAN+ procurement will likely be through either a Crown Commercial Services Framework (under the Public Contract Regulations 2015) or a Competitive Flexible procurement under the Procurement Act 2024
- The proposed duration of the future contract would be three years plus three months

WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

1. Please outline the marine data management expertise of your organisation and staff (Suggested word count: 500 words)

Please include in your answer:

- 1.1. Does your proposed MERMAN+ team hold marine scientific qualifications or professional experience in managing marine data? (Yes/No)
- 1.2. Outline the wider corporate knowledge or access to marine scientific expertise that will allow your organisation to fulfil the scientific inputs for MERMAN+ including the scientific experience requirements for MEDIN Data Archive Centres.
- 1.3. Outline any organisational involvement with marine data initiatives.
- 1.4. Outline any experience of reporting to international marine organisations such as ICES and EMODnet and/or wider organisations that supporting national assessments.
- 1.5. Outline any previous involvement in the UK Marine Strategy and OSPAR that demonstrates your familiarity with these reporting obligations.

2. Please outline the experience of your organisation in conducting reporting of marine data (Suggested word count: 400 words)

Please include in your answer:

- 2.1. Has your organisation been given delegated authority by the UK Government to conduct international submissions of marine scientific data on behalf of the UK? For example, through designation of your organisation as a national

data submission node under the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE) or Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS). (Yes/No, and state which delegated authorities)

2.2. Are you a partner and coordinating centre of SeaDataNet? (Yes/No)

2.3. If the answer to 2.1 and 2.2 is No, please outline how you intend to fulfil the reporting requirements outlined in the specification, including mapping the data flows.

2.4. Do you have any marine data-related accreditations? (Yes/No, and state which accreditations)

3. Please outline your experience of performing quality assurance on marine data (Suggested word count: 500 words)

Please include in your answer:

3.1. Outline your processes for the QA of relevant marine data

3.2. The extent to which your data quality assurance processes are automated?

4. Please outline your experience in managing stakeholder interactions across the marine data sector (Suggested word count: 500 words)

Please include in your answer:

4.1 An example of marine data management user training activities and materials provided by your organisation.

5. How much resource would you provide to the MERMAN+ helpdesk? Do you consider the Service Level Agreements (SLA's), as detailed in the specification, for response times to be realistic?

6. Please provide a rough order of magnitude (ROM) for the cost of the services for a duration of 3 years and 3 months, and what would be the expectation of the Contracting Authority resource to support the services? List any assumptions you have made in calculating this ROM cost. (Suggested word count: 300 words)

7. Please provide any thoughts around the proposed Commercial arrangements for this work, particularly adding any considerations to the following:

- Suggested Duration
- Any suitable pricing models
- Social Value considerations

- Scope for Innovation
- Any further points

ATTACHMENTS

MERMAN+ Data Management Specification

OUR TIMETABLE

DATE	ACTIVITY
04/02/2025	Publication of the RFI
05/02/2025	Clarification period starts
17/02/2025	Clarification period closes
21/02/2025	Deadline for the publication of responses to the RFI Clarification questions
03/03/2025	Deadline for submission of an RFI Response
w/c 10/03/2025	Analysis of RFI responses
w/c 24/03/2025	Confirm next steps to RFI Respondents

QUESTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

- Potential Providers may raise questions or seek clarification regarding any aspect of this RFI document at any time prior to the Response Deadline. Questions must be submitted by email to the RFI lead in advance of 5pm on 17/02/2024
- To ensure that all Potential Providers have equal access to information regarding this Procurement, responses to questions raised by Potential Providers will be published in a questions and answers document, which will be available alongside the RFI document on Find a Tender and Contracts Finder.
- Responses to questions will not identify the originator of the question.
- If a Potential Provider wishes to ask a question or seek clarification without the question and answer being published in this way, then the Potential Provider must notify us and provide its justification for withholding the question and any response. If we do not consider that there is sufficient justification for withholding the question and the corresponding response, the Potential Provider will be invited to decide whether:

- The question/clarification and the response should in fact be published;
or
- It wishes to withdraw the question/clarification.

GENERAL CONTACT POINT FOR THIS RFI

RFI Lead

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