Request for Quotation

A framework for assessing confidence in metabarcoding assays and results

August 2024

Request for Quotation

A framework for assessing confidence in metabarcoding assays and results

You are invited to submit a quotation for the requirement described in the specification, Section 2.

Please confirm by email, receipt of these documents and whether you intend to submit a quote or not.

Your response should be returned to the following email address by:

Email: monitoring.innovation@naturalengland.org.uk

Date: 18/09/2024

Time: 17:00 BST

Ensure you include the name of the quotation and ‘Final Submission’ in the subject field to make it clear that it is your response.

Contact Details and Timetable

Lynsey Harper will be your contact for any questions linked to the content of the quote or the process. Please submit any clarification questions via email and note that, unless commercially sensitive, both the question and the response will be circulated to all tenderers.

| Action | Data |
| --- | --- |
| Date of issue of RFQ | 21-Aug-2024 |
| Deadline for clarifications questions | 30-Aug-2024 at 12:00 BST  |
| Deadline for receipt of Quotation | 18-Sep-2024 at 17:00 BST  |
| Intended date of Contract Award | 30-Sep-2024 |
| Intended Contract Start Date | 07-Oct-2024 |
| Intended Delivery Date / Contract Duration  | 28-Feb-2025 |

Section 1: General Information

Glossary

Unless the context otherwise requires, the following words and expressions used within this Request for Quotation shall have the following meanings (to be interpreted in the singular or plural as the context requires):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| “Authority” | means Natural England who is the Contracting Authority.  |
| “Contract” | means the contract to be entered into by the Authority and the successful supplier. |
| “Response” | means the information submitted by a supplier in response to the RFQ. |
| “RFQ” | means this Request for Quotation and all related documents published by the Authority and made available to suppliers. |

Conditions applying to the RFQ

You should examine your Response and related documents ensuring it is complete and in accordance with the stated instructions prior to submission.

Your Response must contain sufficient information to enable the Authority to evaluate it fairly and effectively. You should ensure that you have prepared your Response fully and accurately and that prices quoted are arithmetically correct for the units stated.

By submitting a Response, you, the supplier, are deemed to accept the terms and conditions provided in the RFQ. Confirmation of this is required in Annex 2.

Failure to comply with the instructions set out in the RFQ may result in the supplier’s exclusion from this quotation process.

Acceptance of Quotations

By issuing this RFQ the Authority does not bind itself to accept any quotation and reserves the right not to award a contract to any supplier who submits a quotation.

Costs

The Authority will not reimburse you for any costs and expenses which you incur preparing and submitting your quotation, even if the Authority amends or terminates the procurement process.

Self-Declaration and Mandatory Requirements

The RFQ includes a self-declaration response (Annex 1) which covers basic information about the supplier, as well as any grounds for exclusion. If you do not comply with them, your quotation will not be evaluated.

Any mandatory requirements will be set out in Section 2, Specification of Requirements and, if you do not comply with them, your quotation will not be evaluated.

Clarifications

Any request for clarification regarding the RFQ and supporting documentation must be submitted via email no later than the deadline for clarifications set out in the Timetable. The Authority shall be under no obligation to respond to queries raised after the clarification deadline.

The Authority will respond to all reasonable clarifications as soon as possible but cannot guarantee a minimum response time. The Authority will publish all clarifications and its responses to all suppliers via email unless deemed commercially sensitive.

If a supplier believes that a request for clarification is commercially sensitive, it should clearly state this when submitting the clarification request. However, if the Authority considers either that:

* the clarification and response are not commercially sensitive; and
* all suppliers may benefit from its disclosure,

then the Authority will notify the supplier (via email), and the supplier will have an opportunity to withdraw the request for clarification by sending a further message requesting the withdrawal of the clarification request. If not withdrawn by the supplier within 2 working days of the Authority’s notification, the Authority may publish the clarification request and its response to all suppliers and the Authority shall not be liable to the supplier for any consequences of such publication.

The Authority reserves the right to seek clarification of any aspect of a quotation and/or provide additional information during the evaluation phase to carry out a fair evaluation. Where the Authority seeks clarification on any aspect of the quotation, the supplier must respond within the timeframe requested by the Authority.

Amendments

The Authority may amend the RFQ at any time prior to the deadline for receipt. If it amends the RFQ the Authority will notify you via email.

Suppliers may modify their quotation prior to the deadline for Responses. No Responses may be modified after the deadline for Responses.

Suppliers may withdraw their quotations at any time by submitting a notice via the email to the named contact.

Conditions of Contract

The Authority’s Standard Good and Services Terms & Conditions (used for purchases under £50k) can be located on the [Natural England Website](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Forganisations%2Fnatural-england%2Fabout%2Fprocurement&data=05%7C02%7CLynsey.Harper%40naturalengland.org.uk%7C3081c49cefb845b96d7f08dcc0eba84c%7C770a245002274c6290c74e38537f1102%7C0%7C0%7C638597365571348506%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=738ZAF7J%2FedNyOMjIEpOrFPGbtkyLT7%2B7ReyRTpSMic%3D&reserved=0) and will be applicable to any contract awarded as a result of this quotation process. The Authority will not accept any changes to these terms and conditions proposed by a supplier.

Suppliers should note that the quotation provided by the successful bidder will form part of the Contract.

Prices

Prices must be submitted in £ sterling, exclusive of VAT.

Disclosure

All Central Government Departments, their Executive Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies are subject to control and reporting within Government. In particular, they report to the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury for all expenditure. Further the Cabinet Office has a cross-Government role delivering overall Government policy on public procurement, including ensuring value for money and related aspects of good procurement practice. For these purposes, the Authority may disclose within Government any details contained in your quotation. The information will not be disclosed outside Government during the procurement.

In addition, the Authority is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, which provide a public right of access to information held by public bodies. In accordance with these two statutes, the Authority may be required to disclose information contained in your quotation to any person who submits a request for information pursuant to those statutes.

Further to the Government’s transparency agenda, all UK Government organisations must advertise on Contract Finder in accordance with the following publication thresholds:

* Central Contracting Authority’s: £12,000
* Sub Central Contracting Authority’s and NHS Trusts: £30,000

For the purpose of this RFQ the Authority is classified as a Central Contracting Authority with a publication threshold of £12,000 inclusive of VAT.

If this opportunity is advertised via Contracts Finder, we are obliged to publish details of the awarded contract including who has won the contract, the contract value, and indicate whether the winning supplier is a small and medium-sized enterprise (“SMEs”) or voluntary organisation or charity. A copy of the contract must also be published with confidential information redacted.

By submitting a Response, you consent to these terms as part of the procurement.

Disclaimers

Whilst the information in this RFQ and any supporting information referred to herein or provided to you by the Authority have been prepared in good faith the Authority does not warrant that this information is comprehensive or that it has been independently verified.

The Authority does not:

* make any representation or warranty (express or implied) as to the accuracy, reasonableness or completeness of the RFQ;
* accept any liability for the information contained in the RFQ or for the fairness, accuracy or completeness of that information; or
* accept any liability for any loss or damage (other than in respect of fraudulent misrepresentation or any other liability which cannot lawfully be excluded) arising as a result of reliance on such information or any subsequent communication.

Any supplier considering entering into contractual relationships with the Authority following receipt of the RFQ should make its own investigations and independent assessment of the Authority and its requirements for the goods and/or services and should seek its own professional financial and legal advice.

Information Security requirements

The Government Security Classification Policy (GSCP) sets out the administrative system used by HM Government (HMG) to protect information and data assets appropriately against prevalent threats through the use of ‘classification tiers’. HMG uses three classification tiers; OFFICIAL, SECRET and TOP SECRET. Each tier provides a set of recommended baseline behaviours and a set of protective controls, which are proportionate to the threat profile for that tier AND the potential impact of a compromise, accidental loss or incorrect disclosure of information held within that tier.

Tenderers and suppliers must ensure that appropriate protective security controls are in place to comply with the GSCP and manage the information shared and received as part of this tender exercise.

A full suite of guidance documents is available on GOV.UK, with specific guidance for tenderers and suppliers set out in [Guidance 1.6 - Contractors and Contracting Authorities.docx (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1166155/Guidance_1.6_-_Contractors_and_Contracting_Authorities.pdf).

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The Authority expects suppliers to declare where they have used AI software in the creation of Tender responses or intend to use AI software in the performance of the contract. How any AI software was, or will be, used should be to be declared within the technical submission part of the tender. We may require you to answer specific question/s on this topic, particularly where the Authority expects that usage is highly likely or clearly relates to the contract requirements.

Suppliers must follow any guidelines or regulations related to AI use and declarations as indicated in the [PPN 2/24 Improving Transparency of AI use in Procurement](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ppn-0224-improving-transparency-of-ai-use-in-procurement/ppn-0224-improving-transparency-of-ai-use-in-procurement-html).

Any information, instructions, or data provided by the Authority to suppliers as part of this tender, the requirements, or contract should not be directly inserted into Generative AI software (such as Gemini, ChatGPT, or CoPilot) without prior permission, unless this information is clearly published in the public domain.

Use of any Authority confidential tender information for training AI software is prohibited. it is advised that Defra’s data or instructions, or anything marked as confidential should not be directly inserted into AIs. For example, putting Authority’s instruction email into Gemini, ChatGPT, or CoPilot is not recommended.

If you intend to use AI to provide goods or services to the Authority, then you are required to complete a declaration which is simply answering the question stated within the 'Information to be returned’. The answer to this question will not be used in scoring your quote.

Protection of Personal Data

In order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 the supplier must agree to the following:

You must only process any personal data in strict accordance with instructions from the Authority.

* You must ensure that all the personal data that we disclose to you or you collect on our behalf under this agreement are kept confidential.
* You must take reasonable steps to ensure the reliability of employees who have access to personal data.
* Only employees who may be required to assist in meeting the obligations under this agreement may have access to the personal data.
* Any disclosure of personal data must be made in confidence and extend only so far as that which is specifically necessary for the purposes of this agreement.
* You must ensure that there are appropriate security measures in place to safeguard against any unauthorised access or unlawful processing or accidental loss, destruction or damage or disclosure of the personal data.
* On termination of this agreement, for whatever reason, the personal data must be returned to us promptly and safely, together with all copies in your possession or control.

General Data Protection Regulations 2018

For the purposes of the Regulations the Authority is the data processor.

The personal information that we have asked you provide on individuals (data subjects) that will be working for you on this contract will be used in compiling the tender list and in assessing your offer. If you are unsuccessful the information will be held and destroyed within two years of the award of contracts. If you are awarded a contract it will be retained for the duration of the contract and destroyed within seven years of the contract’s expiry.

We may monitor the performance of the individuals during the execution of the contract, and the results of our monitoring, together with the information that you have provided, will be used in determining what work is allocated under the contract, and in any renewal of the contract or in the award of future contracts of a similar nature. The information will not be disclosed to anyone outside the Authority without the consent of the data subject, unless the Authority is required by law to make such disclosures.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

The Client is striving to create a diverse and inclusive working environment where every individual has equality of opportunity to progress and to apply their unique insights to making the UK a great place for living. The Service Provider is expected to respect this commitment in all dealings with Natural England staff and service users.

Suppliers are expected to:

* support Defra group to achieve its Public Sector Equality Duty as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and to support delivery of [Defra group’s Equality & Diversity Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defra-group-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2020-to-2024/defra-group-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2020-to-2024).
* meet the standards set out in the [Government’s Supplier Code of Conduct](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supplier-code-of-conduct)
* work with Defra group to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion impacts are addressed (positive and negative) in the goods, services and works we procure, barriers are removed and opportunities realised.

Sustainable Procurement

Addressing global sustainability impacts and realising additional community benefits within commercial activity is core to Defra group’s approach, working with its supply chain is key to achieving sustainable outcomes. In addition to supporting Defra group to meet its outcomes we look to understand and reduce negative sustainability impacts associated with our commercial activity and realise benefits.

The Client encourages its suppliers to share these values, work to address negative impacts and realise opportunities, measure performance and success.

Suppliers are expected to have an understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals, the interconnections between them and the relevance to the Goods, Services and works procured on the Client’s behalf.

Conflicts of Interest

The concept of a conflict of interest includes but is not limited to any situation where an Involved Person or Relevant Body has directly or indirectly, a financial, economic or other personal interest which might be perceived to compromise their impartiality and independence in the context of the procurement procedure and/or affect the integrity of the contract award.

We expect suppliers to mitigate appropriately against any real or perceived conflict of interest through their work with government. A supplier with a position of influence gained through a contract should not use that position to unfairly disadvantage any other supplier or reduce the potential for future competition.

Where the supplier is aware of any circumstances giving rise to a conflict of interest or has any indication that a conflict of interest exists or may arise you should inform the Authority of this as soon as possible (whether before or after they have submitted a quotation). Tenderers should remain alert to the possibility of conflicts of interest arising at all stages of the procurement and should update the Authority if any new circumstances or information arises, or there are any changes to information already provided to the Authority. Failure to do so, and/or to properly manage any conflicts of interest may result in a quotation being rejected.

Provided that it has been carried out in an open, fair and transparent manner, routine pre-market engagement carried out by the Authority should not represent a conflict of interest for the supplier.

Section 2: The Invitation

Specification of Requirements

Background to Natural England

Natural England is the government’s adviser for the natural environment in England. We protect England’s nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. Within England, we are responsible for:

* promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity;
* conserving and enhancing the landscape;
* securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment;
* promoting access to the countryside and open spaces; and
* contributing to social and economic well-being through the sustainable management of the natural environment.

A framework for assessing confidence in metabarcoding assays and results

Background to the specific work area relevant to this purchase

DNA-based methods have the potential to significantly change how we monitor and assess ecosystems. Natural England has been exploring the use of these methods for environmental monitoring for several years, delivering a series of reports which focus on the development of DNA-based methods with potential in a particular area. These methods are now being used more widely within Natural England, particularly the detection of ecological communities using environmental DNA (eDNA). This is often conducted by employing metabarcoding assays which target specific species assemblages (e.g. fish, mammals) or broader taxonomic groups (e.g. vertebrates, invertebrates, bacteria).

The DNA Team aims to operationalise DNA-based methods and produces guidance for using them in monitoring projects. In order to provide sound recommendations, it is important that we understand the limitations of and uncertainties with DNA-based methods. Natural England staff need to be able to understand how DNA-derived data can be used, and the confidence they can have in data derived using different DNA-based methods which have been validated to different stages.

A validation framework for single species eDNA assays was previously developed to allow end-users to evaluate previously published assays for future research and routine monitoring (Thalinger and others 2021). By using the scale, end-users can appropriately interpret results. It also provides validation and reporting standards for the development of new assays. Natural England commissioned a simplified version of this framework to allow us to assign a confidence level to single species assays for their use in condition assessments and management plans, or to target where more survey effort may be required (Harper and others 2021). However, no such framework exists for metabarcoding assays.

Metabarcoding assays are inherently more complex than single species assays. There are many available metabarcoding assays and often more than one for a given taxonomic group. Different assays may have been validated to varying degrees on different sample types in different environments and applied in various contexts, which affects the interpretation of results. There are also numerous eDNA metabarcoding providers, each providing results in a non-standard format. This situation has led to challenges for widespread adoption of eDNA metabarcoding approaches by end-users. It is difficult for Natural England staff to understand, interpret, and determine confidence in the results of different metabarcoding assays or assess the risk of false positive or false negative results.

This project aims to address some of these challenges through the development of an eDNA metabarcoding assay validation framework. This will include:

* Establishing key criteria to enable the classification of metabarcoding assays based on their taxonomic coverage, taxonomic resolution and detection sensitivity for different groups.
* Assessing the suitability of metabarcoding assays for different sample types and environments.

This will enable end-users to determine the recommended scenarios for application of a given assay and improve assay performance with further validation.

Requirement

The objective of this project is to construct a validation framework for eDNA metabarcoding assays. The contractor should work closely with the Natural England Project Officer and a steering group comprised of academic, government, non-governmental, and commercial organisations to ensure that the framework is appropriate for use by Natural England staff and other end-users.

Please provide separate quotes for undertaking each requirement. Natural England reserves the right to let only one of these requirements.

1. Framework construction
	1. The contractor should produce an overview of validation steps for metabarcoding assays. Different approaches to metabarcoding and their trade-offs (e.g. one-step vs. two-step PCR, PCR vs. ligation, Qubit vs. qPCR quantification, choice of sequencing platform, OTUs vs. ASVs, method of taxonomic assignment) should be discussed.
	2. Building upon existing projects aiming to define best practice and minimum reporting standards for metabarcoding, the contractor should define parameters that can be used to assess metabarcoding studies in consultation with leaders in eDNA metabarcoding (to be proposed by contractor and agreed upon by Natural England and the project steering group). These should encompass all steps of the metabarcoding process, including *in silico* and *in vitro* validation of primers, sample collection, sample preservation, DNA extraction, PCR amplification, library preparation, sequencing, bioinformatics, and data analysis.
	3. The parameters should be placed onto a levelled scale from Basic to Operational, i.e. the validation scale (to be proposed by contractor and agreed upon by Natural England and project steering group). Consideration will need to be given to requirements for a metabarcoding assay to be operational for regulation vs. other scenarios. The remaining uncertainties at each level and valid interpretation of results should be identified.
2. Pilot test
	1. The contractor should perform a small-scale test of the validation scale using the 12S-V5 primers (Riaz and others 2011; Kelly and others 2014) as a case study. Up to 20 scientific publications that have used this metabarcoding assay on eDNA samples (i.e. water, sediment, soil, air or other environmental samples and not faeces, gut contents, blood meals or other samples derived directly from organisms) should be assessed for the validation scale parameters and the assay level determined.
	2. Modifications to the validation scale required for a large-scale meta-analysis of the scientific literature should be proposed by contractor and agreed upon by Natural England and the project steering group.
3. Scoping exercise
	1. The contractor should distribute a questionnaire to the UK DNA Working Group and other eDNA consortia to assess which metabarcoding primers are most commonly used on which sample types, and in which environments.
	2. The contractor should perform a literature review to identify metabarcoding studies for inclusion in a meta-analysis. The number of studies should be reduced to a maximum of 500 using the results of the questionnaire (to be proposed by the contractor and agreed upon by Natural England and the project steering group).
4. Meta-analysis
	1. The contractor should perform a meta-analysis of studies identified by the literature review using the validation parameters and place metabarcoding assays on the validation scale.
	2. Recommendations for future work and/or best practice should be provided.
	3. A template for assessing new metabarcoding assays against the validation scale should be provided (to be proposed by the contractor and agreed upon by Natural England and the project steering group).
	4. The contractor should archive and publish the literature database and meta-analysis online and open access.

The results should be compiled into a final detailed report (see outputs for details).

Quotation submission

Please provide the following supporting documents:

* Proposed methodologies
* Health & Safety Policies/certificates
* CVs of key personnel who will be directly involved with this contract
* Examples of past work

Sustainability

Natural England protects and improves the environment and is committed to reducing the sustainability impacts of its activities directly and through its supply chains.  We expect the Contractor to share this commitment and adopt a sound, proactive sustainable approach in keeping with the 25 yr environmental plan/our commitments compliant with all applicable legislation. This includes understanding and reducing direct and indirect sustainability impacts and realising opportunities, including but not restricted to; resilience to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, water use and quality, biosecurity, resource efficiency and waste, reducing the risk of pollution, biodiversity, modern slavery and equality, diversity & inclusion, negative community impacts.

As a delivery partner, the successful contractor is expected to pursue sustainability in their operations, thereby ensuring the Contracting Authority is not contracting with a supplier whose operational outputs run contrary to the Contracting Authority’s objectives. The successful contractor will need to approach the project with a focus on the entire life cycle of the project

Please provide details of how any plastic waste produced as part of DNA extraction will be reduced.

Outputs and Contract Management

A final written report detailing the activities and analysis undertaken should be provided to the Natural England Project Officer. The final report must follow the [Natural England report writing guidance](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5790636781600768) including use of template and adherence to the accessibility requirements.

The data and report produced will be made available by Natural England under an Open Government Licence.

The Final Report must include:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Requirement | Information |
| Framework construction | * An introduction to eDNA metabarcoding and barriers to widespread adoption by end-users.
* An overview of approaches to metabarcoding and their trade-offs.
* A summary of consultation with academic leaders and end-users in the field.
* A list of the validation parameters (names and definitions) that will be used to assess metabarcoding studies, and where they place on a levelled scale from Basic to Operational.
* A discussion of remaining uncertainties at each level of the scale and valid interpretation of results.
 |
| Pilot test | * The results of the pilot test using the 12S-V5 metabarcoding assay.
* An Excel spreadsheet containing the results of scoring for each validation parameter and the overall validation level should be provided.
* Any modifications to the validation scale required for a large-scale meta-analysis of the scientific literature should be discussed.
 |
| Scoping exercise | * A list of the most frequently used metabarcoding assays (based on questionnaire results), the proportion of studies they have been used in of those identified by the literature review, the sample types they have been applied to, and the environments they have been used in.
* Clear and detailed methodology of questionnaire design and distribution as well as literature search and refinement including databases and queries used.
 |
| Meta-analysis | * Clear and detailed methodology for the meta-analysis.
* Results of the meta-analysis, including where metabarcoding studies rank on the validation scale.
* Discussion of findings and a list of recommendations for further work and/or best practice.
* Provide a template for assessing new metabarcoding assays against the validation scale.
* Open-access archival and publication of the literature database and meta-analysis.
 |

The report will be made publicly available on our Access to Evidence portal. After submission and publication on Access to Evidence, the content of the report will contribute to a publication in a scientific journal. The contractor may be the lead author if they are prepared to take responsibility for writing the manuscript and publication. Otherwise, the contractor will be an author on this publication and lead authorship will be determined after completion of the project in consultation with all partners. The Natural England Project Officer will be last author.

Following the completion of this project, the report will be evaluated and reviewed by Natural England, and any next steps decided on.

Important timescales and deadlines for key deliverables are outlined below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Deliverable  | Responsible Party  | Date of completion  |
| Inception meeting held  | Successful contractor and Natural England  | October 2024  |
| Fortnightly meetings with Natural England's project officer  | Successful contractor  |   |
| Monthly meetings with the project steering group | Successful contractor and Natural England  |  |
| Draft report (in digital format, details above) sent to Natural England  | Successful contractor   | 31st January 2025 |
| Draft report with any Natural England comments returned  | Natural England  | 14th February 2025 |
| Final report (in digital format) and data submitted to Natural England  | Successful contractor  | 28th February 2025 |

References

HARPER, K.J., TANG, C.Q., BRUCE, K., ROSS-GILLESPIE, A., ROSS-GILLESPIE, V., & EGETER, B. 2021. A framework for assessing confidence in environmental DNA qPCR assays and results. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 359.

KELLY, R.P., PORT, J.A., YAMAHARA, K.M., & CROWDER, L.B. 2014. Using environmental DNA to census marine fishes in a large mesocosm. *PLoS ONE*, 9(1), p.e86175.

RIAZ, T., SHEHZAD, W., VIARI, A., POMPANON, F., TABERLET, P., & COISSAC, E. 2011. ecoPrimers: inference of new DNA barcode markers from whole genome sequence analysis. *Nucleic Acids Research*, 39(21), e145-e145.

THALINGER, B., DEINER, K., HARPER, L.R., REES, H.C., BLACKMAN, R.C., SINT, D., TRAUGOTT, M., GOLDBERG, C.S., & BRUCE, K., 2021. A validation scale to determine the readiness of environmental DNA assays for routine species monitoring. *Environmental DNA*, 3(4), 823-836.

Payment

The Authority will raise purchase orders to cover the cost of the services and will issue to the awarded supplier following contract award.

The Authority’s preference is for all invoices to be sent electronically, quoting a valid Purchase Order number. Invoice to be submitted on completion of the contract.

It is anticipated that this contract will be awarded for a period of 6 months to end no later than 28/02/2025. Prices will remain fixed for the duration of the contract award period. We may at our sole discretion extend this contract to include related or further work. Any extension shall be agreed in writing in advance of any work commencing and may be subject to further competition.

Evaluation Methodology

We will award this contract in line with the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) as set out in the following award criteria:

Technical – 60%

Commercial – 40%

Evaluation criteria

Evaluation weightings are 60% technical and 40% commercial, the winning tenderer will be the highest scoring combined score.

| Award Criteria | Weighting (%) | Evaluation Topic & Weighting | Sub-Criteria | Weighted Question |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Technical | 60% | Service / Product Proposal | Methodology | 5 QuestionsQ1.1 (15% of technical score available)Q1.2 (10% of technical score available)Q1.3 (15% of technical score available)Q1.4 (20% of technical score available)Q1.5 (20% of technical score available) |
| Key personnel | 1 QuestionQ2 (10% of technical score available) |
| Experience of similar contracts | 1 QuestionQ3 (10% of technical score available) |
| Commercial | 40% | Whole life cost of the proposed Contract | Commercial Model | 1 Question Q4 (100% of commercial score available) |

Technical (60%)

Technical evaluations will be based on responses to specific questions covering key criteria which are outlined below. Scores for questions will be based on the following:

| Description | Score  | Definition |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Very good  | 100 | Addresses all the Authority’s requirements with all the relevant supporting information set out in the RFQ. There are no weaknesses and therefore the tender response gives the Authority complete confidence that all the requirements will be met to a high standard.  |
| Good | 70 | Addresses all the Authority’s requirements with all the relevant supporting information set out in the RFQ. The response contains minor weaknesses and therefore the tender response gives the Authority confidence that all the requirements will be met to a good standard.  |
| Moderate | 50 | Addresses most of the requirements with most of the relevant supporting information set out in the RFQ. The response contains moderate weaknesses and therefore the tender response gives the Authority confidence that most of the requirements will be met to a suitable standard.  |
| Weak  | 20 | Substantially addresses the requirements but not all and provides supporting information that is of limited or no relevance or a methodology containing significant weaknesses and therefore raises concerns for the Authority that the requirements may not all be met. |
| Unacceptable | 0 | No response or provides a response that gives the Authority no confidence that the requirement will be met.  |

Technical evaluation is assessed using the evaluation topics and sub-criteria stated in the Evaluation Criteria section above.

Separate submissions for each technical question should be provided and will be evaluated in isolation. Tenderers should provide answers that meet the criteria of each technical question.

| Methodology | Detailed Evaluation Criteria |
| --- | --- |
| Q1.1 Provide details of the methodology and approaches proposed to deliver requirement 1 of the project.Responses should not exceed two sides of A4, and use Arial font, size 11. | Your response should:1) Demonstrate a clear understanding of the nature of the requirements.2) Be a clear, practical, achievable, and cost-effective methodology to deliver these requirements.3) Have information in sufficient detail to allow a full appraisal of the suitability of the approach to deliver for the project. |
| Q1.2 Provide details of the methodology and approaches proposed to deliver requirement 2 of the project.Responses should not exceed one side of A4, and use Arial font, size 11. |
| Q1.3 Provide details of the methodology and approaches proposed to deliver requirement 3 of the project.Responses should not exceed two sides of A4, and use Arial font, size 11. |
| Q1.4 Provide details of the methodology and approaches proposed to deliver requirement 4 of the project.Responses should not exceed two sides of A4, and use Arial font, size 11. |
| Q1.5 Provide proposed project plan for the work, together with mitigation for any potential risksResponses should not exceed three sides of A4, and use Arial font, size 11. | Your response should:1) Provide a proposed timeline.2) Highlight any potential risks to demonstrate understanding of the project and provide potential mitigation. |

| Key personnel | Detailed Evaluation Criteria |
| --- | --- |
| Q2 Provide details of key staff involved in each requirement of the projectResponses should not exceed 1 page of A4 (Arial font, size 11) per person | Your response should provide evidence of staff experience in:1. Metabarcoding and developing guidance or standards.
2. Reviewing and extracting information from metabarcoding studies.
3. Designing questionnaires and performing literature reviews, ideally in the context of eDNA research.
4. Performing meta-analyses, ideally in the context of eDNA research.
 |

| Experience of similar contracts  | Detailed Evaluation Criteria |
| --- | --- |
| Q3 Provide details of similar contracts / work that you have been involved in | Your response should give clear examples of previous, similar, experience, particularly: 1. Developing guidance or standards for metabarcoding.
2. Performing literature reviews of eDNA studies.
3. Performing meta-analyses of eDNA studies.
 |

Commercial (40%)

The Contract is to be awarded as a fixed price which will be paid according to the completion of the deliverables stated in the Specification of Requirements.

Suppliers are required to submit a total cost to provide the deliverables stated in the Specification of Requirements. In addition to this the Commercial Response template must be completed to provide a breakdown of the whole life costs against each deliverable used in the delivery of this requirement.

Calculation Method

The method for calculating the weighted scores is as follows

* Commercial

Score = (Lowest Quotation Price / Supplier’s Quotation Price ) x [40%] (Maximum available marks)

* Technical

Score = (Bidder’s Total Technical Score / Highest Technical Score) x [60%] (Maximum available marks)

The total score (weighted) (TWS) is then calculated by adding the total weighted commercial score (WC) to the total weighted technical score (WT): WC + WT = TWS.

Information to be returned

Please note, the following information requested must be provided. Incomplete tender submissions may be discounted.

Please complete and return the following information:

* completed Commercial Response template
* separate response submission for each technical question (in accordance with the response instructions)
* completed Mandatory Requirements (Annex 1)
* completed Acceptance of Terms and Conditions (Annex 2)

Award

Once the evaluation of the Response(s) is complete all suppliers will be notified of the outcome via email.

The successful supplier will be issued the contract via a Purchase Order.

Annex 1 Mandatory Requirements

Part 1 Potential Supplier Information

Please answer the following self-declaration questions in full and include this Annex in your quotation response.

Part 1.1 Potential Supplier Information:

| Question no. | Question | Response |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1.1(a) | Full name of the potential supplier submitting the information |  |
| 1.1(b)  | Registered office address (if applicable) |  |
| 1.1(c) | Company registration number (if applicable) |  |
| 1.1(d) | Charity registration number (if applicable) |  |
| 1.1(e) | Head office DUNS number (if applicable) |  |
| 1.1(f) | Registered VAT number  |  |
| 1.1(g) | Are you a Small, Medium or Micro Enterprise (SME)? | (Yes / No) |

Note: See EU definition of SME <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en>

Part 1.2 Contact details and declaration

By submitting a quotation to this RFQ I declare that to the best of my knowledge the answers submitted and information contained in this document are correct and accurate.

I declare that, upon request and without delay you will provide the certificates or documentary evidence referred to in this document.

I understand that the information will be used in the selection process to assess my organisation’s suitability to be invited to participate further in this procurement.

I understand that the authority may reject this submission in its entirety if there is a failure to answer all the relevant questions fully, or if false/misleading information or content is provided in any section.

I am aware of the consequences of serious misrepresentation.

| Question no.  | Question | Response |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1.2(a) | Contact name |  |
| 1.2(b) | Name of organisation |  |
| 1.2(c) | Role in organisation |  |
| 1.2(d) | Phone number |  |
| 1.2(e) | E-mail address  |  |
| 1.2(f) | Postal address |  |
| 1.2(g) | Signature (electronic is acceptable) |  |
| 1.2(h) | Date |  |

Part 2 Exclusion Grounds

Part 2.1 Grounds for mandatory exclusion

| Question no.  | Question | Response |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2.1(a) | Please indicate if, within the past five years you, your organisation or any other person who has powers of representation, decision or control in the organisation been convicted anywhere in the world of any of the offences within the summary below. |
|  | Participation in a criminal organisation.  | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.1 (b) |
|  | Corruption.  | ((Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.1 (b) |
|  | Fraud.  | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.1 (b) |
|  | Terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.1 (b) |
|  | Money laundering or terrorist financing | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.1 (b) |
|  | Child labour and other forms of trafficking in human beings | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.1 (b) |
| 2.1(b) | If you have answered yes to question 2.1(a), please provide further details.Date of conviction, specify which of the grounds listed the conviction was for, and the reasons for conviction.Identity of who has been convictedIf the relevant documentation is available electronically please provide the web address, issuing authority, precise reference of the documents. |  |
| 2.1 (c) | If you have answered Yes to any of the points above have measures been taken to demonstrate the reliability of the organisation despite the existence of a relevant ground for exclusion? (i.e. Self-Cleaning) | (Yes / No) |
| 2.1(d) | Has it been established, for your organisation by a judicial or administrative decision having final and binding effect in accordance with the legal provisions of any part of the United Kingdom or the legal provisions of the country in which the organisation is established (if outside the UK), that the organisation is in breach of obligations related to the payment of tax or social security contributions? | (Yes / No) |
| 2.1(e) | If you have answered yes to question 2.3(a), please provide further details. Please also confirm you have paid or have entered into a binding arrangement with a view to paying, the outstanding sum including where applicable any accrued interest and/or fines. |  |

Part 2.2 Grounds for discretionary exclusion

| Question no.  | Question | Response |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2.2(a) | The detailed grounds for discretionary exclusion of an organisation are set out on this [webpage](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/551130/List_of_Mandatory_and_Discretionary_Exclusions.pdf), which should be referred to before completing these questions. Please indicate if, within the past three years, anywhere in the world any of the following situations have applied to you, your organisation or any other person who has powers of representation, decision or control in the organisation |
| 2.2(b) | Breach of environmental obligations?  | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.2 (f) |
| 2.2(c) | Breach of social obligations?  | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.2 (f) |
| 2.2(d) | Breach of labour law obligations?  | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.2 (f) |
| 2.2(e) | Shown significant or persistent deficiencies in the performance of a substantive requirement under a prior public contract, a prior contract with a contracting entity, or a prior concession contract, which led to early termination of that prior contract, damages or other comparable sanctions? | (Yes / No)If yes please provide details at 2.2 (f) |
| 2.2 (f) | If you have answered Yes to any of the above, explain what measures been taken to demonstrate the reliability of the organisation despite the existence of a relevant ground for exclusion? (Self Cleaning) |  |

Annex 2 Acceptance of Terms and Conditions

I/We accept in full the terms and conditions appended to this Request for Quote document.

Company \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_