

Scaling Autonomous Integrated Global eDNA Observations (SAIGe) Global Fish Observatory (GFO) Funding Procedures

OBJECTIVES

As part of the implementation of the SAIGe project, POGO/OBON is offering support through the **Global Fish Observatory (GFO) Grant Programme**. This initial tranche of funding is a proof-of-concept pilot initiative designed to set the stage for the full Global Fish Observatory. The aim is to test, evaluate and optimise autonomous sampling technologies and passive sampling techniques alongside traditional fish trawl assessments at established ocean monitoring sites for eDNA-based monitoring of fish populations.

Global fish populations continue to face pressures from overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, climate-driven ecosystem changes and habitat degradation. Effective monitoring is essential for sustainable management and conservation. The proposed GFO will be a transformative, highly collaborative initiative using **autonomous eDNA monitoring** to enhance global understanding of fish diversity, distribution and temporal change.

Establishing the GFO requires robust evidence on the performance and interoperability of autonomous sampling systems. This call therefore focuses on pilot studies that build the scientific and operational foundations for the future GFO. It will pave the way for a globally coordinated monitoring system supported by OBON project networks to safeguard marine biodiversity and ensure the long-term sustainability of global fish stocks.

Funding Priorities

GFO proposals should align with the following priorities:

1. **Laying the foundations** for the future Global Fish Observatory by demonstrating how project outcomes will support GFO development
2. **Benchmarking and intercomparison of up to three autonomous eDNA sampling technologies** (see appendix i) together with passive sampling methods, addressing performance, feasibility and interoperability
3. Ensuring projects are **based at an established ocean observatory** site that already conducts routine fish sampling such as trawl-based monitoring

Note: One project will be funded at a WESTPAC-based ocean observatory

Additional Requirements

- **Sequencing** will be centrally coordinated at a **Minderoo Foundation Laboratory at UWA (Perth, Australia)**
 - All data and metadata generated must be made publicly available through **OBIS**, following **BeBOP** and **FAIRe data practices** using BBNJ batch identifiers, incorporated into existing templates for upload to OBIS
 - Proposals must include a clear plan for side-by-side evaluation of autonomous and passive samplers, as well as comparison to routine fish sampling
 - Grants will be issued for a **fixed duration of 12 months and should be completed no later than 30 Sept 2027**
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PROCEDURE AND TIME SCALES

Dissemination of GFO funding opportunities will occur through OBON global and regional networks (including WESTPAC where relevant).

Two-Stage Submission Process (Phase I)

1. **Expression of Intent** — *Deadline: 15 April 2026*
2. **Invitation to Submit Full Proposal** — successful applicants invited by *1 May 2026*
3. **Full Proposal Deadline** — *20 May 2026*

We plan to fund **2 grants of £125,000 (GBP) each**, open to not-for-profit organisations, with priority given to **OBON-endorsed projects** and WESTPAC-region applicants.

Proposal Requirements

1. Partners Involved
2. Intellectual Merit
3. Ocean Observatory Description
4. Technology Description and Methodology
5. Relevance to OBON and GFO objectives
6. Timelines
7. Budget Justification

A call for proposals will be issued, accompanied by a template and submission instructions.

Timeline

Action	Year	Date
Secretariat announces opportunity & deadlines	2026	25 March
Expression of Intent due	2026	15 April
Invitations for full proposals sent	2026	1 May
GFO Full Proposal deadline	2026	20 May
Proposal selection completed	2026	End June
Grant agreements issued; funding begins	2026	1 Aug

SELECTION PROCESS

The OBON Executive Committee, supported by the OBON Technology Working Group (TWG) and Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), will oversee:

- Proposal review and evaluation
- Selection decisions
- Post-grant monitoring
- Dissemination of GFO outputs

Assessment Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- Relevance to GFO objectives and [OBON strategy](#)

- Alignment with funding priority areas
- Strength of scientific and technical approach
- Appropriateness of deliverables, milestones, and success indicators
- Quality and diversity of consortium (geographic and gender balance)
- Linkages to OBON projects

Conflicts of interest will be managed by excluding conflicted reviewers from deliberation.

The availability of alternative funding sources will *not* influence selection decisions.

REPORTING

Grant recipients will be required to:

- Present progress during OBON Annual Meetings and in the OBON webinar series
 - Submit interim reports according to the timeline
 - Provide a final narrative and financial report within **one month** of project completion
 - Include receipts for all expenditures
 - Provide visuals and short articles for the OBON newsletter
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FURTHER INFORMATION

For enquiries, contact the OBON Programme Manager:

Ms. Luz H Rodriguez-Vargas

Email: lro@pml.ac.uk

CC: observing@obon-ocean.org (*please cc in all correspondence to ensure that e-mails are picked up by a member of the team in case of absence*)